

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance Team

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general education and special education independent school approval to serve students ages 7-22, in the disability categories of autism spectrum disorder and the additional initial disability categories of developmental delay, intellectual disability, and speech or language impairment, to INSPIRE for Autism, Brattleboro, Vermont?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grant renewal of general education and special education independent school approval to serve students ages 7-22, in the disability categories of autism spectrum disorder, developmental delay, intellectual disability, and speech or language impairment, to INSPIRE for Autism, Brattleboro, VT. This approval is for a term through June 30, 2023.

That the school report to the Agency of Education within five business days any changes in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 166
State Board of Education Rule 2228

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. An independent school may operate and provide elementary education or secondary education if it is approved by the State Board of Education.
2. The State Board of Education shall approve an independent school if it substantially complies with the Board's rules for independent schools, promulgated as Series 2200 (Independent School Program Approval). Only independent schools that are approved by the SBE may receive public tuition dollars.
3. INSPIRE for Autism (INSPIRE) is seeking renewal of general and special education approval.

4. The Secretary appointed a Review Team to visit the school and make a recommendation as required by SBE Rule 2222. Because INSPIRE for is seeking approval to provide both general education and special education services, the Review Team’s recommendation consists of two parts. INSPIRE is a day program serving students in grades 7-22.

GENERAL EDUCATION REPORT

Brian Morgan performed the general education portion of the review. He recommended approval for five years through June 30, 2023 based on a report date of January 24, 2018. In summary, Mr. Morgan found that: the facility meets all state and federal health and safety regulations and is handicapped accessible; the school provides a minimum course of study as required by 16 V.S.A § 906 and adapts it to the ages and abilities of the students; the school has the resources, including financial capacity and staff, to meet its objectives; the health, safety, attendance, and assessment records are in good order; the operating schedule meets public school requirements; and the school has a policy on prevention of harassment as stringent as the agency’s model policy. Mr. Morgan’s report is attached hereto.

SPECIAL EDUCATION REPORT

The Agency of Education’s Special Education Review Team performed the special education review at INSPIRE. The Team visited the school and toured the facility, interviewed staff, observed staff/student interactions and reviewed student files and IEPs, including conducting a comprehensive of three Vermont students’ files. The Review Team noted only one issue of concern – that special education services to be provided to one student exceeded the number of minutes that student was enrolled in any given day or week. Following the visit, the school addressed this issue by meeting with the student’s IEP team and made adjustments to the IEP to allow the appropriate services to be provided within the student’s schedule. In other respects, the school meets the requirements of the Board’s rules, e.g., appropriate policies, procedures and staff training, educational records, coordination with LEAs and parent, participation in IEP review and progress reporting. The Executive Director of INSPIRE addressed the issue in a letter, noting that this was the only error found by the review team and it concerned how the school district wrote the hours - they were double counting services such as paraprofessional and special education teacher, based on the fact that the teacher was present when the paraprofessional was as well – not whether the required services were provided. The Review Team recommends a three-year renewal of special education approval in the disability category of autism spectrum disorder. The Review Team is also recommends a three year initial approval for the disability categories of development delay, intellectual disability, and speech of language impairment. The director requests that the approval be granted for the entire five-year window. The special education report together with a letter from INSPIRE is attached hereto.

ACTING SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

Recommendation The Acting Secretary recommends that the State Board of Education approve INSPIRE's application for renewal of approval for general and the requested special education categories for a term expiring June 30, 2023.

Rationale The special education team correctly noted the inconsistency between a student's attendance records and IEP. Without minimizing the importance of accurate records (without which there could be no assessment of whether necessary services were provided), this was the only negative finding and it was appropriately resolved when brought to the school's attention.

STAFF AVAILABLE:

Molly Bachman, General Counsel

Cassandra Ryan, Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance Coordinator