

**AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont**

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of tutorial approval, to serve a maximum of 14 male youth, 16 to 22 years of age, to **Valley Vista** in Bradford, VT?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of tutorial approval, to serve a maximum of 14 male youth, 16 to 22 years of age, to Valley Vista in Bradford, VT. This approval is for a term through June 30, 2020.

That the tutorial program reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in policies, programs, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. §828
State Board Rule 2230

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. OAS, LLC, dba Valley Vista is an 80-bed inpatient residential treatment center located in Bradford, VT. OAS, LLC began as a VT corporation under the ownership of two individuals from New York, who responded to a Request for Proposal (RFP) issued by the VT Department of Health's Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (ADAP) for a multipurpose residential treatment program. In addition to adult treatment programs, Valley Vista (VV) established an Adolescent Treatment Program (ATP) to provide inpatient primary treatment and extended therapeutic treatment to chemically dependent adolescents within a structurally supportive environment. The Adolescent Treatment Program was licensed through the Department for Children & Family Services (DCF) to operate a Residential Treatment Program to serve a maximum of eleven youth, male and female, 13 up to 18 years of age. Valley Vista was initially granted tutorial program approval by the Vermont State Board of Education in 2007. Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §11 and SBER 2230.1, a tutorial program means education provided to a pupil who is placed in a short-term program for evaluation and treatment purposes that is not administered by a school district.

2. In September of 2017, Meridian Behavioral Health acquired OAS, LLC, dba Valley Vista. Meridian Health, which is based out of the twin cities area of Minneapolis-St Paul, has more than 25 years experience developing evidence-based care models focused on positive patient impact. Although Meridian Health now owns Valley Vista, the Valley Vista Board of Directors retain local representation and is active in the operations of the programs. Other than a few retirements, there have been no other staff changes in the treatment programs since the purchase of Valley Vista by Meridian Health. Valley Vista is also accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).
3. In July of 2018, Valley Vista realigned and expanded its treatment program. The Adolescent Treatment Program was replaced with a DCF licensed Young Adult Program geared towards serving up to 14 male youth ages 16-22. This change was made for two reasons—over the last few years there was a declining enrollment of younger patients, who were more often referred to mental health providers instead of VV; and there has continued to be a wait list in VT for a program structured to serve young male youth 16 years of age and older.
4. Upon admission, or whenever possible prior to admission, Valley Vista contacts the school district(s) regarding a youth's admission to the program so that coordination of educational services can be arranged. The tutorial's special educator serves as the liaison with the school district(s), in addition to providing individual instruction as needed. The majority of the youth have online school classes through their home district schools. Valley Vista employs .75 FTE tutors qualified to provide instruction in the core subject areas (English, math, social studies, science) for at least 10 hours per week. Nicole Mitchell is the Director of the Young Adult Treatment Program. Valley Vista's Treatment Director, Amanda Hudak, works closely with Ms. Mitchell to assure program continuity. Psychiatrist Susan Smiga continues in her role overseeing the medical component of Valley Vista's treatment programs. The average length of stay in the approved tutorial is five to six weeks. At the time of the visit by the review team, there were six program participants, three of which were Vermonters.
5. Valley Vista has policies and procedures around confidentiality and maintenance of records. The tutorial maintains a register of daily attendance for each participant. Fire drills are regularly scheduled and conducted. There are policies and procedures in place to maintain a safe environment, and these policies and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis. VV has an emergency plan; and the program participants and any new staff is oriented within the first 24 hours across all shifts. There is an RN onsite 24/7. All storage and dispensing of medication is made by a member of the medical staff. Staff members are required to have regular drug screening and background checks, as well as training in CPI. This training equips the staff with positive strategies for handling difficult situations and managing workplace conflict safely and respectfully.

6. Valley Vista's approved tutorial program operates in a rented wood-framed farmhouse in Bradford on the grounds of the former Brookside Nursing Home. The property is quiet and private with plenty of outdoor space. The tutorial program utilizes two rooms in the farmhouse--the outer room provides space for the staff as well as four computer stations for student work; the larger room is used for classroom group lessons and/or 1:1 instruction. The residences for the male youth are in a wing of the main Valley Vista facility. Included in this wing is the male youth's bedrooms, lounge/group therapy area, and professional staff offices, one of which is for the Adolescent Clinical Director/Primary Therapist. The Valley Vista residential facility is entirely handicapped accessible; the farmhouse is handicapped accessible on the first floor. Both the residential facility and the farmhouse meet state and federal health and safety regulations, and are adequate to meet the needs of the youth in the tutorial program. A copy of the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) issued by the Division of Fire Safety is on file at the Agency.
7. Valley Vista provided a copy of its independent auditor's report from Kittell, Branagan and Sargent, and a profit and loss statement detailing income and expenses through December 2017. As with all residential treatment programs licensed by DCF, Valley Vista has rates set for room and board, residential treatment, and education through the Private Non-Medical Institution (PNMI) process through the Agency of Human Services' Rate Division.
8. Valley Vista's Tutorial Program was visited on behalf of the Secretary of Education by Pat Pallas Gray and Ernest Wheeler on April 20, 2018.

Tutorial Program Review Report

REPORT

May 24, 2018

Valley Vista

Submitted by
Special Education Review Team



Approval Recommendation

Two year tutorial approval for the Valley Vista tutorial program in Bradford is recommended. Valley Vista is commended for its attention to detailed record keeping and correspondence with Local Education Agencies (LEAs). These efforts ensure students receive current classroom work and receive credit within their LEAs for schoolwork completed while in temporary attendance at the Valley Vista program.

Rationale

Based on the rules for tutorial approval, Valley Vista adequately met expectations because they have been appropriately providing tutorial services to students with and without disabilities. The Agency finds that policies and procedures implemented by the tutorial program enable students to remain in good academic standing with their LEAs despite experiencing various degrees of personal trauma and addiction issues.

Tutorial Description

The Valley Vista tutorial program is a residential treatment facility for adolescents with substance abuse disorders and co-occurring mental health issues. Each population has its own clinical team. Within the adolescent program at Valley Vista the students receive evidence-based services from an appropriately trained and licensed special educator.

Review Description

The Valley Vista program, located in Bradford, Vermont, was visited by Agency of Education staff on 4/20/2018. During the visit, the Agency employee interviewed staff, toured facilities, observed staff/student interactions during a classroom observation and reviewed the file and Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the only student of six in the adolescent program receiving special education services. The student file reviewed qualified for special education services under the disability category of specific learning disability. This student file was found to have a recently completed annual review of the IEP, but was not yet in the file, and a current special education eligibility report that meets the state mandated requirement for being completed within the past three years. AOE staff subsequently requested a copy of the newly developed IEP from the student's Local Education Agency (LEA) and has found it also met regulatory timeline requirements. AOE staff also reviewed a copy of a student summary report provided to a LEA upon a student's discharge from the Valley Vista program. This report was found to provide a breakdown of the student's work and the amount of time devoted to each subject area while in attendance at the facility.

Review Findings

2230.3.1 – Valley Vista provided evidence that the instructional methods are age and ability level appropriate to the student with a disability currently in attendance at the program and are coordinated with the student's responsible LEA.

2230.3.2 – Valley Vista has sufficient facilities and materials or access to other facilities and materials as necessary to provide an appropriate education.

2230.3.3 – Valley Vista facilities and operation comply with local, state and federal requirements pertaining to the health and safety of students.

2230.3.4 – Valley Vista employs an adequate number of professional staff for the population served and these staff members are qualified by training and experience in the areas in which they are assigned.

2230.3.5 – The Valley Vista teacher providing or supervising the provision of special education services has licensure and endorsement as required for the equivalent work in a Vermont public school.

2230.3.6 – Valley Vista professional staff has relevant experience and/or training in the duties to which they are assigned.

2230.3.7 - Valley Vista maintains a register of the daily attendance of each of its students and reports this attendance to the responsible LEA of the student.

2230.3.8 - Valley Vista maintains an operating schedule that includes instruction for no less than 10 hours per week unless inconsistent with medical and/or educational recommendations. The operating schedule is sufficient to ensure that the instructional services address the individual needs of the student with disabilities and are consistent with the student's IEP.

2230.3.9 – Valley Vista has the financial capacity to carry out its educational purposes for the period of approval.

2230.3.10 – Valley Vista coordinates educational services with the responsible LEA, including documentation for the purpose of obtaining high school credit for coursework completed. Valley Vista also coordinates, where appropriate, with other responsible agencies, such as the Department for Children and Families, Community Mental Health Centers, and Family Parent Child Centers, as well as local, private mental health professionals.

Notes on Evidence

Based on a review of the single IEP, school documentation of schedules, staffing, and contract services, the following recommendation is offered.

The AOE recommends that the following be corrected through the IEP process:

- A. When a student remains in a tutorial program for more than 10 days, the IEP cover page and services page should be amended to include documentation of the program where the student is attending and the special education supports as offered within the program. This should not include the name and description of the previous program or the program the student is expected to return to upon their discharge. AOE staff will inform the current LEA of this requirement.

Questions: Contact Ernest Wheeler at ernest.wheeler@vermont.gov

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

Cassandra Ryan, Fiscal and Financial Compliance Coordinator