

State Board of Education Education Quality Standards Rule Update Committee

Draft Meeting Minutes

Meeting Place: Virtual Teams Meeting/Video/Teleconference

Call in #: 1-802-828-7667, Conference ID: 798 703 455#

Date: December 8, 2022

Present:

State Board of Education (SBE) Subcommittee Members: Kimberly Gleason (co-Chair), Tammy Kolbe (co-Chair), Tom Lovett, & Patrick Brown

Agency of Education (AOE): Maureen Gaidys

Others: Wichie Artu; Dan Ferris, NEASC; Claire Leheny, Executive Director, AISNE; Sarah Wilson, Director of Accreditation, AISNE; Sharon Howell, Head, St. Johnsbury Academy; Carrie Brennan, Head, Thetford Academy; Katie Ballard, Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Call to Order/ Roll Call/Amendments to Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 11:32 a.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Public to be Heard

Wichie Artu, health equity and data systems professional, offered a short presentation to share information, statistics and context for the need to approve standards that ensure that students can see themselves in their educational experience, helping to inform how others see them and how they see the world. (see attached presentation)

Invited Testimony and Committee Discussion

- Independent School Compliance -

o **Dan Ferris, NEASC - (see attached submitted testimony)**

- shared information on the NEASC accreditation and school improvement process, which has been revised in the last several years to address equity in education
- reference several areas where equity is considered within their standards. Equity is not addressed as a stand alone standard, but rather considered within several standards
- Patrick Brown asked about the diversity in the make up of their organization. Mr. Ferris indicated that they are not highly diverse beyond a balance in gender, that they have aspirations for greater diversity in their organization and that the chair of their board of trustees is a black woman, and there are others of color on the board.
- Kim Gleason asked about the make of the peer review teams. Mr. Ferris indicated that if the focus of their accreditation is DEI then the peer review team may include DEI directors from peer institutions. Gleason follow-up to better understand how they might choose to have the DEI be a “focus of their accreditation” rather than a requirement of the process. Ferris indicated that the DEI expectations are woven throughout the standards.
- Tom Lovett indicated that when he chaired a peer review team on a Catholic school, the team included other independents that were not religious schools.
- Tammy Kolbe inquired about the review process w/ respect to curriculum. She was interested in understanding how students are exposed to a broad range of perspectives, in books and other instructional materials. Ferris indicated that a school could chose to meet the standards teaching on the “great books.” And if otherwise they don’t meet the expectation of the standards, then they would have an unmet standard, and a timeframe to come into compliance.
- Kolbe also inquired about the ability to consider a Vermont specific addendum to the accreditation process. NEASC is open to that. There was discussion about how that could be administered and what that would mean for those previously accredited schools. Renewal is a 10 year cycle, with a 2 and 5 year interim report.

- Clair Leheny, Executive Director, AISNE, and Sara Wilson, Director of Accreditation, AISNE
(see attached slide presentation regarding the process and other submitted materials)

- They provided a high level over view of the values underpinning their standards, their research and benchmarking resources, DEI programming to include weekly calls with diversity staff around the area and annual diversity conference.

- Equity is embedded throughout 14 standards (DEIJ)

- Their process seeks to balance school independence with ensuring safe, equitable, just school environments.

- AISNE is open to discussing options for a Vermont specific addendum.

- Sharon Howell, Head, St. Johnsbury Academy (SJA) - (see attached testimony)

- Howell shared that SJA serves 920 students, grades 9-12, coming from over 50 towns. There are also boarding students from 25 countries and 17 states. 120 teaching faculty, Class sizes averaging 12. Broad course offerings to include AP classes.

- Howell indicated that SJA is fervently supportive of the goals of Act 1, but doesn't not believe that compliance with EQS should be required of independent schools.

- Brown asked how diversity is reflected in teaching and administrative staff. Howell indicated this to be an area of challenge with their location in the North East Kingdom.

- Gleason asked what Howell felt would be the challenge in compliance with EQS for SJA. Howell indicated that she didn't not think that they would have a problem complying with EQS, if that is helpful for the state.

- Tom Lovett clarified that from his prior experience as Head of SJA, it would be a problem to need to comply with the governance and licensure portions of the EQS.

- Carrie Brennan, Thetford Academy - (see attached testimony)

- Thetford Academy currently complies with EQS as an independent school, and is a middle and high school historic town academy. Thetford Academy is an independent school with a public purpose.

- Brennan shared information regarding the student population:

- 95% of students attend with public tuition

- designated school for Thetford town, thus 57% of students are from Thetford; serve 12 other sending towns

- Brennan indicated that they are in support of updating the EQS and their commitments to DEI have been in the core values for many decades. They are striving to be an anti-racist institutions, participate in an anti-racism task force, and have hired their first DEI coordinator.

- Brennan expressed concern about the expectations for independents who do not operate with the same central office structure or support that Supervisory Unions have. And she felt that the intentions are impressive, but resources are limited. Schools are hard at work implementing transformative change to comply and Brennan is concerned about the shift to new EQS at this times.

- Brennan is also concerned that often the technical support and/or financial funding that public schools have available through the AOE is not available to the independent schools.

- Brown inquired about the diversity of the Academy. Brennan said that 8-10% are students of color, multicultural; 20-15% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Board of Trustees is large (up to 21 in the bylaws), and some serve on both the Thetford Town School Board and the Academy Board of Trustees.

- **Special Education Considerations - Katie Ballard, SEAP, attended.** Due to extended discussion with and questions for representatives from the independent school community, this item was tabled until the next meeting 12/15/22.

Future Meetings & Agenda Items

- Brown requested that the committee review the feedback from the Public Listening Session, November 30, 2022.
- Invited testimony from and discussion with the Special Education Advisory Panel
- Review of feedback from Act 1 working group on the AOE recommended changes.

Public to be Heard

- There was no additional public to be heard.

Adjourn

- At 1:16p.m., Gleason made a motion to adjourn and Brown seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes prepared by..... Kim Gleason, Co-Chair, EQS Committee