

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general independent school approval to Mid Vermont Christian School, White River Junction, Vermont, to serve students in grades K-12?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval to Mid Vermont Christian School, White River Jct., VT, to serve students in grades K-12. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2022.

Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Agency of Education whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration, during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 166(b)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. Mid Vermont Christian School started in 1987 and graduated its first senior class in 1997. It is a 501(c) 3 non-profit interdenominational Christian School not affiliated with any one church. Nearly thirty different congregations are represented among the faculty and student body. Attendance is open to students of any race, color, nationality and ethnic origin. The school serves families throughout the greater Upper Valley area in both New Hampshire and Vermont. At the time of the application the school had 105 students. The mission of the school is to glorify God by preparing students for college and for life through a program of academic excellence established in Biblical truth.
2. The school is governed by a board of directors, who abide by an established school constitution. The Headmaster, who is in charge of daily operations, reports directly to the school board. The school board is elected by the school association (parents), meets monthly, and reports to the full school association at least once a year.

3. **Affiliations:** The school is a member of the Educational Records Bureau. The school is also a member of the Association of Christian Schools International (5,300 member schools in approximately 100 countries with an enrollment of nearly 1.2 million).
4. **Daily Program:** MVCS has a traditional yet current academic program. There is a qualified teacher for each subject area. All subjects are taught from nationally recognized textbooks normally found in any other private or public schools. The main curricular track in high school is college preparatory. To date 80% of their graduates have gone to college.

5. **School Site Visit**

This reviewer arrived at the MVCS Elementary School (K-6) Building just before 9:00am. I was greeted by the long time Elementary School Principal. This Principal gave me a tour of the K-6 facility. She shared with me for review all documents that were relative to the elementary school building including policies and safety procedures. We also had time to discuss teacher supervision/evaluation and professional development. I was able to observe a 4th grade math lesson and interviewed the 2/3 grade teacher. I then transitioned to the 7-12th grade building at 10:35 am and was cordially greeted by the Headmaster/High School principal Robert Bracy, Jr. While at the Jr./Sr. High Building, I interviewed two teachers (World Languages and History) and was able to observe two classes (Adv. Biology and Algebra). Mr. Bracy then gave me a tour of the academic building and the athletic building/gymnasium. Robert and I were able to spend a solid 90-120 minutes for Record and Policy Review and an in-depth interview and discussion. I left the building at 2:40pm.

6. **Description of Facilities**

The MVCS campus is a beautiful and well maintained set of three buildings, Preschool-6, 7-12 and a gymnasium/athletic facility attached by a corridor to the 7-12th grade building. The elementary school is a renovated building purchased early on. As the student population continued to increase grade level by grade level the 7-12th grade building and athletic facilities were constructed on a site of about 9 acres. Classrooms and common areas in both buildings are generous in size, bright, well-lit and very clean. Most of the elementary building is ADA accessible and all of the 7-12th grade is ADA accessible. In the 7-12th grade building there are two music rooms, an art room, a world languages, science lab, computer lab and several common areas. The Elementary School and Jr./Sr. High School share many of the academic, athletic and fine arts spaces. There is an athletic field for soccer and a large playground. The buildings are all up to code and regular inspections are current and up to date. The Headmaster shared with

me the school's long-term goal of adding a separate Fine Arts facility for the performing and visual arts.

7. Minimum Course of Study and Required Assets

A minimum course of study of learning experiences adapted to a pupils age and ability in the field of basic communications skills, etc. was evident at MVCS. A detailed description of the curricula was submitted in the MVCS application and from the onsite visit it is clear the curriculum is age and ability appropriate. The staff adapts the curriculum when appropriate to meet the needs of each student's learning profile including students who have IEP's or 504 plans. Small classes and highly qualified teachers deliver a well thought out curriculum that is reviewed regularly by the school curriculum committee.

8. Staffing: Adequacy; Qualifications; Professional Development

The number of administrative staff at MVCS is four (4) and the number of fulltime and part time faculty at MVCS is seventeen (17) The Job descriptions (roles and responsibilities and resumes) were available, complete and up to date. The Headmaster has a Masters in Educational Leadership and the Elementary Principal and all teaching staff have either a BA, BS, MA, MS, or Doctorate. My observations and interviews indicated a high level of "love of the job," passion for the curriculum, respect for their colleagues and determination to provide the best education possible for the students. All stakeholders I talked with knew the mission, the core values and educational objectives of the school. Professional Development opportunities were encouraged. Each year the staff/faculty participate in whole school professional development opportunities such as Promethean Interactive Panel Instruction, Mindsets, Flipped Classrooms, Using Tech – W- Instruction, 21st Century Effective Teacher Qualities, The Art and Science of Teaching and more. Personal Improvement Plans are developed each year which encourage teachers to pursue individual self-improvement with support from the administration. If a teacher is pursuing a Masters, as in the case of the Foreign Language teacher, the administration will search for grant funding and other support such as release time etc.

9. Financial Capacity

Included in the application was the 2015 CPA Financial Review and at the time of the visit the 2016 CPA Financial Review was presented and in order. With a thirty (30) year history and a student count hovering around 100 students, the school maintains a balanced budget and have never finished a year in the red. As most independent schools revenue is dependent on tuition. The school is endeavoring to create an endowment for financial aid and teacher salaries, does two fundraisers a year, has an alumni data base and is well aware of the challenges of keeping solvent.

10. Student Attendance and Assessment Records. Fire Drill and Safety Records.

These records were reviewed and found to be in good order. The school uses the Sycamore School Software System to help keep data in these areas.

11. Operating Schedule; Number of Instructional Hours. The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours each year of 933+ hours and schools days of 175+ per year.

12. Policies: Admission, Health and Safety, Discipline, Harassment/Bullying.

Review of the school's parent/student handbook, staff/faculty handbook and emergency and safety procedures reveals that the school has developed policies for health and safety, admission, discipline and more. The school has a policy on prevention of harassment and all other policies required and desired to operate a school efficiently, effectively and safely.

13. School Improvement Plans. As mentioned earlier the school has a plan to design and fundraise for a fine arts center in the future. There are also plans to continue maintaining and improving the existing facility.

Summary and Recommendation

The Mid Vermont Christian School is a school that “walks the walk and talks the talk” in terms of its mission and educational objectives. The school's application was complete and the visit allowed the reviewer to witness teaching and learning in an environment that allowed for and promoted students to always do their best, to follow their passions and dreams and to prepare for a college education. The school balances its commitment to a Christian education and values with all the other things one would expect in a preschool to 12th grade educational institution: strong academics, athletic opportunities, outstanding fine arts offerings, college counseling, a dedicated staff/faculty and a caring and supportive community. MVCS meets the AOE standards and requirements for an Approved Vermont Independent School.

The school was visited on January 27, 2017 by Steve Lorenz, a GenEd contracted consultant. Mr. Lorenz is recommending that the SBE grants renewal of GenEd independent school approval to Mid Vermont Christian School located in White River Junction, Vermont for a period of five years.

COST IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

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