



Nonpublic School Advisory Council Meeting

New Hampshire Department of Education
25 Hall Street | Concord, NH 03301
Granite State College Building | Room 302

Tuesday, September 26, 2023

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

(approved 11.28.23)

1.0 Members Physically Present

David Thibault - *Diocese of Manchester*
Lisa Dias – *World Academy*
Christy Whipple - *Newport Montessori School*
Andrea Elliot - *Bishop Brady High School*
Chuck George - *New Hampton School*
Matthew Hicks - *Shaker Road School*
Tobias Iselin - *The Wediko School*
Ryan DeJoy - *Windham Woods School*
Linda Johnson - *McLane Middleton*
Timothy Carney - *Bureau of Educational Opportunities*
Heidi Clyborne - *Bureau of Special Education Support*
Dan Love – *Sant Bani School*

Attending Remotely

Susan Harrington - *Brewster Academy*

2.0 Review of minutes from last meeting

- Heidi Clyborne introduced herself.
- Andrea Elliot motioned, and Matthew Hicks seconded to approve minutes as amended. The motion was unanimously approved.

3.0 Public Comment – None - no public signed up to comment.

4.0 Discussion of creating an NSAC Newsletter

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- There are 140 nonpublic schools around the state. Matthew Hicks is willing to gather and compile information and create a newsletter for email. The goal is to generate knowledge of interest. Information to be included in newsletter will be sent to Matthew Hicks along with meeting summaries and minutes. The newsletter will be released three times a year (approximately after every two meetings since there are six annually). The council discussed rotating who is responsible for creating the newsletter each time. Council members decided the best approach would be to create a shared document where everyone can enter the information they wish to have included in each newsletter. The council agreed the letter would be emailed from them instead of by Tim Carney. Matthew Hicks will provide set dates for the newsletter in an upcoming meeting.
 - Ryan DeJoy made a motion to approve the creation and distribution of a NSAC newsletter. The motion was seconded by Linda Johnson. The motion was unanimously approved.
5. Linda Johnson pointed out that there used to be a nonpublic school newsletter sent out by NHED. Tim Carney was not aware of this prior newsletter and stated that he recently made efforts to get the nonpublic schools added to NHED's *Friday Forum* newsletter to improve communication from NHED.
6. The question was raised: how do public schools know they are behind on mandatory reporting deadlines? Tim Carney explained that his office maintains a spreadsheet with school contacts that is constantly updated. However, some nonpublic schools do not notify his office of turnover in leadership. This turnover is often discovered during the spring and fall reporting periods when his emails regarding reports are unanswered and further inquiry is necessary.
7. Vote to recommend to the State Board of Education (SBOE) that Cognia be approved as a nonpublic school accrediting agency.
- Multiple council members agreed the information provided was too long and contained a significant amount of law. Several members gave feedback on what method they felt helped extract the necessary information to make a recommendation. Tim Carney explained the size of the application was increased because, upon initial review, detail on some of the fifteen requirements were missing. Some of that information was crucial for the nonpublic school council to be able to make a recommendation without having to research further independently. Tim Carney shared there are five approved accreditation agencies, and there is no limitation on how many are allowed. Tim Carney pointed out that nonpublic schools do not need certification or accreditation. It is a choice, and Andrea Elliot agreed. Other concerns from NSAC include the cost of accreditation not being clear, the ability to add conditions for residential and day schools, Cognia dictating graduation requirements instead of reviewing the graduation clearance process, and the document's large size. The concern regarding document size is that schools will miss something initially and then after engaging in the accreditation process, unexpectedly find something they are not comfortable with resulting in time and money being wasted. David Thibault noted the purpose of the accreditation process

is to seek ways a school can improve. Tim Carney suggested inviting Cognia in to address the concerns and questions of the council. Christy Whipple suggested amending the process to every six years to align with public schools. Tim Carney said the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHED) is looking into making the process five years across the board. Tim Carney clarified that NHED does not look at accreditation reports for nonpublic schools. That information is used by nonpublic schools and shared with families of students currently enrolled and for improvement and marketing. David Thibault discussed feedback on Cognia he received at the catholic school superintendent meeting being positive and that schools who used Cognia found it helpful. NSAC agreed they are not yet ready to vote on a recommendation. Multiple members approved Cognia attending the next meeting in November to address questions and concerns directly before a vote. Tim Carney stated he would reach out to Cognia to coordinate their attendance at the next scheduled NSAC meeting.

8.0 Nonpublic School Update

- Tim Carney indicated his office is moving forward with SBOE approval of two schools. One is the New England School of Arts in Lebanon, and the other is granting a grade expansion for Building Block Commons in Exeter.
- Tim Carney is updating the webpage to be better used as a resource. He would like to add the NSAC Newsletter, a hot button for issues, and discussed the importance of nonpublic schools completing the staff change form instead of emailing him. This step is essential to ensure the NHED data team enters the correct contact emails for each school into all systems. Tim Carney will reach out to confirm schools like the changes made to the website.
- A discussion clarified that if a school is adding a grade or moving buildings, it must be approved even if everything else is staying the same. These rules are based on safety. All buildings must be inspected for health, zoning, and fire, etc.
- A council member asked if there is someone who can address ransom and cyber-attack fears or for additional resources. Tim Carney will check with the data department and get back to NSAC.
- Matthew Hicks inquired if more interest has been seen in smaller nonpublic schools forming. Tim Carney confirmed there has been more interest, particularly with church-based and smaller nonpublic schools (approximately seven last summer and between three and four this summer). Tim Carney clarified that micro schools do not fall under nonpublic schools. Matthew Hicks expressed concerns about background checks and the safety of the children. A conversation regarding EFA took place, and Tim Carney suggested that NSAC invite Brian Voelk, the NHED EFA administrator, to a meeting to respond to NSAC questions and concerns.

- A council member also suggested inviting Kate Baker from the Children's Scholarship Fund. The board agreed to extend those invites after the November meeting with Cognia.

9.0 Open NSAC discussion

- Linda Johnson offered that the cyber security person in her firm could put on a small forum or free webinar to address the cyber security concerns mentioned earlier in the meeting.
- The question was asked how many nonpublic schools are in New Hampshire. Tim Carney answered approximately one hundred and thirty-eight. Some special situations can affect how the total number is determined.

10. Public Comment – None - no public signed up to comment.

11. Chair David Thibault thanked everyone for coming.

12. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Christy Whipple and seconded by Andrea Elliot at 5:15 pm. The motion was approved unanimously.