



Nonpublic School Advisory Council Meeting

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

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

I. Call to Order – 4:02 PM.

The meeting was called to order at 4:02 pm.

Members Physically Present

David Thibault
Andrea Elliot
Matthew Hicks
Ryan DeJoy
Gina Powers
Linda Johnson
Dan Love

Members Virtually Present

Jill Grant
Tobias Iselin
Lisa Dias
Susan Harrington

Members Not Present

Christy Whipple
Chuck George
Lissa Sirois

Staff and Guests

Tim Carney, NHED Administrator of Educational Pathways
Lynette Ronchaquira, NHED Program Specialists III
Marlon Austin, NHED School Facility Inspection Administrator
George Edwards, New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NAESC) Chief Accreditation Officer
Jim Mooney, NAESC Deputy Director for Accreditation and School Improvement
Kate Baker, Executive Director of Children’s Scholarship Fund New Hampshire (CSF)
Matt Southerton, Director of Policy and Compliance (CSF)

II. Review and approval of the January 23, 2024, draft meeting minutes.

Members reviewed the draft meeting minutes from January 23, 2024. Linda Johnson was listed as remote and in-person but was only remote, and Gina Powers was listed as present in error. Unanimous roll call vote of all in favor, except for Gina Powers and Dan Love who abstained because they were not present for the last meeting.

III. Public Comment Period.

There were no public comments.

IV. Introduction of George Edwards and Jim Mooney from New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

George Edwards and Jim Mooney attended the meeting on behalf of NEASC to discuss NEASC’s application for recognition as a nonpublic school accrediting agency and answer questions as needed following initial council discussion.

- Linda Johnson asked how often the reaccreditation process happens. Tim Carney responded every ten years. Previously, NEASC was a default but in 2018, that was stricken out and NEASC’s accreditation lapsed.
- Matthew Hicks asked what happens to schools who are currently accredited through NEASC. Tim Carney advised the accreditation of the school is still valid through the organization.
- Dan Love asked if a vote to approve recommendation to the State Board could be made at this meeting. David Thibault responded yes, but the council requested the visit today to give a brief presentation and answer any questions before the vote.
- Linda Johnson asked NEASC if there have been changes in the past ten years in what you expect from schools and if anticipated changes are foreseen. George Edwards responded that NEASC revised the standards for independent schools in 2020. Jim Mooney responded that two significant changes occurred. One, the self-study process has been divided into two parts, allowing the school to focus first on the foundation standards, and then the team from NEASC works with the school on program standards. Schools receive check-ins three times over the ten-year span. The result is that more is asked of schools annually and less of them every ten years. Also, program standards have become more student-centered. Second, issues related to

anxiety and depression are showing a subtle ramping up. Once dedicated to facility safety, the standard dedicated to health and safety has now taken on this other essential component. Relating to the anticipated changes is understanding the impact of AI and providing guiding principles around the use of technology and AI in schools. Jim Mooney added that NEASC continually looks at the process and standards to ensure they meet the needs of accredited schools.

- Dan Love made a motion that NSAC recommend NEASC be recognized as an accrediting agency for NH non-public schools. Matthew Hicks seconded. Unanimous roll call vote of all in favor.

V. Introduction of Kate Baker and Matt Southerton from Children's Scholarship Fund New Hampshire (CSF).

Kate Baker and Matt Southerton attended the meeting on behalf of CSF to entertain questions about Education Freedom Account (EFA) and the Education Tax Credit (ETC) programs.

- Kate Baker explained the difference between the two programs and their different functions.
- Jill Grant asked about the letter of educational attainment. Does the report card have to be an end-of-the-year report card, or can it be a mid-year report card? Kate Baker responded that the Department of Education did not specify but said the report card can be substituted only for the portfolio evaluation letter. Most families are completing the applications towards the end of the year, so an end-of-the-year report card is usually available. Kate added that the report card does not replace the standardized test.
- Jill Grant advised that an email from CSF would be helpful as an administrator to inform families that the enrollment process has begun. Kate Baker responded that enrollment always begins in the first or second week of March, and the deadline is always July 15th because CSF must upload the AOI report to NHED. The only reason July 15th would change is if the day fell on a weekend. Then, it is moved to that Monday.
- Andrea Elliot commented that it is difficult for school leaders to determine what to award in financial aid without having access to the letter indicating what a family will receive from EFA. ETC letters are available online for administrators to take into consideration during financial aid determination. Matt Southerton clarified the difference between the laws in both and responded CSF is prohibited by law to provide that information. Kate Baker added ETC requires enrollment verification which is why it is available online. EFA is a grant given to families and they have parent agency on how funds are spent and initiating payments. CSF approves or rejects how families spend the allocated funds.
- Kate Baker clarified the state adequate education grant funding is a standardized amount no matter which school a child attends and explained the process of how additional funds are determined (i.e. special education, low income, and English language learner). Matt added, not everyone who

- qualifies for ETC applies for EBA, and not everyone who qualifies for free or reduced lunch applies for that money.
- Jill asked if children who qualify for additional services from school is included in the EFA. David Thibault and Kate Baker clarified IDEA is funded from federal dollars and is separate.
 - Andre Elliot commented that families have communicated some confusion on why other agencies used for financial aid by schools such as FACTS require the previous year's tax return, but EFA and ETC require the family's current year financial information. Kate responded EFA applications aim to use the most current household income information. David Thibault added, FACTS allows the previous year's household income information so the process can be started earlier. However, they request families update it as soon as new information becomes available.
 - David asked, if it is recommended that EFA application are completed before financial aid applications. Kate responded schools should have some knowledge of the aid that is being awarded to families because the tax credit scholarship is calculated on the tuition due after the aid. However, EFA is standardized so that information is not required. Kate added EFAs can be multi used for diverse educational needs. For example, purchasing a computer, or tutoring services not available through schools.
 - Jill Grant asked why the base amount last summer was expected to be \$3,450 but instead \$3,772. Matt responded the state law allows CSF to use up to 10% of the money for administrative fees for the cost of administering the program. CSF was able to come in a little under 8% so additional money was able to be given to students.
 - Susan Harrington asked if there is a process for independent schools to opt out of EFA. Matt responded you do not have to sign up for a class wallet account to accept direct payments, but as a nonpublic school approved by the state you can not discriminate against a family from enrolling in your school and then applying for reimbursement through their approved EFA. The new provider director will indicate that a school does not accept direct payment from EFA.
 - Susan Harrington asked if any other organization in New Hampshire receive these funds or is it only CSF. Kate confirmed only CSF.
 - Susan asked approximately how many children receive it. Kate responded approximately 4,932 as of this April.
 - Gina Powers asked how many years the contract between CSF and NHED is. Kate responded the contract is for five years.

VI. Introduction of Marlon Austin, NHED School Facility Inspection Administrator.

Marlon Austin, School Facility Inspection Administrator gave a brief presentation to introduce himself and speak to the new ED 320 rules and how they will apply to nonpublic schools.

- David Thibault asked if the length of the approval is tied into the nonpublic schools. Tim Carney responded yes; the length is five years. There is no more three-year period. Marlon added the new standard date is June 30th.
- David asked if a new school is opening, will a site visit be conducted. Marlon responded both public and nonpublic new schools have a mandatory site visit. Renewals may or may not have a site visit due to volume. Marlon will have webinars available to ensure schools can meet the required laws.
- Jill Grant asked who performs site visits. Marlon Austin confirmed he will perform all site visits. Marlon added, he will send out a checklist before a visit to ensure schools are prepared and know exactly what he will be looking for.
- Jill asked when the nonpublic school application will be updated with this information. Marlon responded he will add the renewal information the first week of next month. There will be an instruction in the application for exactly what needs to be done.
- Ryan DeJoy asked if you need to publicize on your website, you are asbestos free. Tim Carney responded that is a federal requirement and can be on the website, in the handbook, etc. Ann at the Department of Environmental Services (DES) would be able to advise.
- Tim Carney clarified that non-profits are subject to federal O'HARA regulations but for profits are not.

VII. Discussion of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) application for recognition as a nonpublic school accrediting agency and review process for Christian Schools international (CSI) accrediting agency application.

- Jill Grant asked for clarification on ACSI and CSI. Tim Carney responded that is correct.
- David Thibault asked how these agencies come to NHED. Tim confirmed they are working with schools in the state.
- The council confirmed at the next meeting they will be ready to discuss the ACSI application sent out by Tim Carney and have a representative available at the meeting to answer questions. CSI will be scheduled for the meeting after.

VIII. NHED Office of Nonpublic Schools Report. (Tim Carney)

- One new elementary school is in the works for approval.
- One school who is expanding grades.
- One school may be closing due to difficulty finding teachers. Tim clarified the only reason the state board will close a school is if you report zero students for two consecutive years.
- Twenty-seven nonpublic schools are going through the renewal process this year. Suggested deadline is April 1st. Currently sixteen out of twenty-seven applications have been received so far. Tim will reach out to schools after April 1st.

- The civics history requirement appears to be an issue for several schools. Tim clarified it must be one credit course in civics, not just embedded. Ryan DeJoy commented additional guidance on this issue would be helpful. Tim will look into this. The grievance policy is also a challenge for some schools. Gina Powers reported the graduation requirement has also been an issue for some schools.
- A local security administrator will be assigned to nonpublic school so people can be assigned for things such as naturalization test results.
- Andrea Elliot asked if the most updated version of the naturalization test will be updated. Tim Carney responded it is in legislation.
- Nonpublic awareness. Tim has been forwarding emails to ensure available training opportunities get out to everyone.
- In the next couple of months, Tim would like to get feedback and information on equitable services and the transportation law.

IX. Open Council discussion.

- a) The board considered a concern that was raised to a board member about nonpublic school regulations. The details of the discussion will not be public record for the privacy of the people involved.
- b) Rule change which requires NSAC to be responsible for helping to create the meeting agenda and taking their own minutes.
 - Tim confirmed he and Lynette will be available for the next meeting to assist with the transition.
 - David Thibault expressed the relationship between the council and NHED is to advise the Commissioner, so he wants to ensure it is still a shared enterprise especially in terms of the agenda.
 - This item will be added to the next meeting agenda for further discussion and planning.
- c) Other
 - Linda Johnson shared information about upcoming webinar.

X. Public comment period.

There were no public comments.

XI. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Andrea Elliot at 5:52 pm. Seconded by Gina Powers. Unanimous roll call vote of all in favor