

Nonpublic School Advisory Council
NH Department of Education, Office of Nonpublic Schools
Tuesday, December 1, 2020
MINUTES

Meeting held telephonically due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency.

Members in Attendance:

Andrea Elliot (Brad Choyt)	Gina Power Linda Brodeur	Nathaniel Greene Shireen Meskoob
Caitlin Davis	Linda Johnson	Susan Harrington
Christy Whipple	Lisa Dias	Toby Iselin
Chuck George	Matthew Hicks	
Dave Thibault	Mike Runey	

REVIEW OF PROGRAM APPROVAL AGENCIES: AACS AND AISNE

The NH DOE noted that there are two program approval agencies seeking recognition by the NHDOE. The American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) submitted a renewal application and the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) submitted an initial application. As a group the Council took notes on whether each organization met the standards set forth in Ed 405(b)-(c). The goal was to evaluate whether the organizations met each standard in terms of providing the information, and not whether they met each qualitatively.

To review, schools are approved by the NH DOE for either attendance purposes only (AA) or for attendance and program purposes (AP). Schools with an AP status are required to have their program approved by a program approval agency recognized by the NHDOE.

As of the day of the meeting, there are four recognized agencies: the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC); the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI); the American Association of Christian Schools (AACS); and the Accrediting Association of Seventh Day Adventist (AAA). The addition of two more agencies would give schools a broader opportunity to apply for AP status, which puts them on a five-year approval term, versus a three-year term that schools with AA status have.

The Council proceeded with walking through the checklist, point by point, and shared whether they agreed that the agency had met the standards set forth in Ed 405, whether they did not agree, or whether they needed more information. If anyone had concerns, the Council stopped and had a quick discussion on the point.

Ultimately, the comments that the group shared and the decision they made will be presented to the State Board of Education, scheduled in January right now, which decides whether the NH DOE shall recognize the agencies.

As the Council moved through the checklist, it could also make some decisions in regard to the requirements that are set forth. Since they are revising the rules this year, changes proposed can be

incorporated when the rules are presented to the State Board, which again is the ultimate decision maker in approving the rules.

It was noted that one area of the standards worth examining was the graduation component, wherein clarity regarding the grade levels that a program approval agency is warranted. If AISNE accredits Gr K-9, then this needs to be apparent to the public, the schools, and the NH DOE.

A second area worth examining was whether the Council wanted to keep the residential component as part of the requirements. Does a program approval include the residential aspect offered at a nonpublic school, and do accrediting agencies examine this area in the first place?

Third, the question came up as to whether agencies should be required to include a table of contents with their application. Lengthy applications that were accompanied by a table of contents, such as that presented by the AACCS, were extremely useful in dissecting the application into relevant components. Graphics were also deemed helpful. Council members suggested that a guidance document be provided to applicants before they submit their materials.

It was concluded that a message would be sent to the two agencies under current review in regard to clarification questions and concerns of the Council. The responses will be provided to the Council, with the goal to present the Council's evaluation in January, as indicated above.

CONCERNS RAISED ABOUT THE AACCS

Section 405(b),(1),f of the NH Code of Administrative Rules, Ed 400, asks for a "description of procedures used in the evaluation of schools by the agency including documentation that a school shall be required to provide, which shall include a visit to verify the written documentation, and who participates in school visitations." We understand that accreditation teams include one or more experienced, Christian classroom teachers. Can the agency provide additional details on who participates in school visitations?

Section 405(c),(14) asks for a description of school and community relations. It is noted that relationships with the "community are positive and contribute to successful operation," and that the school "is a benefit to the community." Can the agency provide additional details in regard to how it measures community relations?

CONCERNS RAISED ABOUT THE AISNE

Section 405(c),(13),f of the NH Code of Administrative Rules, Ed 400, asks for a description of parent involvement with the school. We understand that communication between the school and families in regard to student progress and questions, respectively, exist. Can the agency provide additional details in regard to the parental involvement?

CONDUCTING BUSINESS OVER ZOOM

The protocols and procedures for conducting business over Zoom, public notice, taking minutes, taking roll call, etc. will be investigated and shared with the group. Decisions will be made by examining the

executive order relative to meeting remotely, and consulting with the NH DOE Attorney and Division Director Caitlin Davis.

ED 400 REVISIONS

The revision of rules will be prepared for the Council a month preceding the next meeting, anticipated to be held in late February or early March. Of particular importance are the sections in Ed 400 relative to the membership, function, and duties of the Council. A vote for a chairperson will also be held.