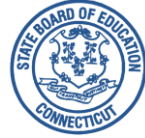




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Jeffrey S. Bravin, Chief Administrator  
American School for the Deaf

**FROM:** Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant *DP*  
Bureau of Special Education

**DATE:** February 18, 2022

**SUBJECT:** PRELIMINARY EVALUATION REPORT  
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program

On October 28, 2021, an evaluation team visited American School for the Deaf (ASD) to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);  
Ms. Jennifer Del Conte, Director of Special Services, Easton and Redding Public Schools; and  
Ms. Lisa Riggi, Education Director, Aspire Living and Learning.

During a previous site visit on October 26, 2021, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration.

At the exit conference on October 28, 2021, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The following areas of the special education program have been reviewed:

- governance
- administration
- fiscal management
- admissions
- individual student records
- program requirements
- evaluation of student progress and reporting responsibilities
- student management techniques
- qualifications and requirements for instructional, administrative, and support personnel
- health and safety
- termination of enrollment

**Commendations:**

The beautiful campus houses excellent facilities appropriate for addressing the academic, social, emotional, and physical development needs of students. A structured and nurturing environment supports and stimulates the development of the whole child. Overall, the school provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff is committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students.

The program provides a barrier-free language accessible environment. Utilizing an American Sign Language (ASL)/English Bilingual approach, students are provided a dual language foundation in both ASL and written and spoken English. This approach integrates ASL, speech, auditory training, reading, writing, and the use of assistive learning devices. Through this support, students improve their communication skills, minimize their frustrations, and uncover the talents that allow them to thrive.

The overall climate and culture of ASD was described as warm, inviting, supportive, and engaging.

Staff described the leadership, specifically the education director (assistant executive director), as highly collaborative, supportive of the entire educational team, and knowledgeable about all aspects of the program.

The small class sizes (up to six students) promote student engagement and individualized academic support. The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Teachers had identified goals and objectives that were clearly stated and posted during the course of the lesson. Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. The students observed were engaged in their instruction and demonstrated a willingness to take risks.

As identified in the IEP, students have access to related services, including audiology, cochlear implant services, speech and language therapy, aural habilitation, individual and group counseling, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and educational testing.

Family communication and engagement is a program strength. The program recognizes that supporting parents and caregivers is an integral part of providing student support. Extensive family supports provided include free family sign language classes and family “play” groups for children in the Birth to Three program. There is frequent communication with families through phone calls, videophone, and email contact with clinicians, educators, related service providers, residential administrators, and nursing staff. The program hosts many family-focused activities on campus (e.g., BBQs, a Thanksgiving event, informational sessions, and bingo). The program sends monthly newsletters to families, which include photos of prior events and upcoming activities.

The program embraces the use of technology that supports teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. As described by the observation team, “the program provides a very technology-rich environment that is robust and amazing.” The school is equipped with the latest state-of-the-art amplification systems and educational software, to ensure students have total access to language and communication. All students have 1:1 devices (Chromebook or iPad) and every classroom has a ViewSonic device (replaced whiteboards), desktop computers with adaptive keyboards, videophone systems, and announcement boards in the hallways and classrooms.

The program recently developed a Bridge program, which is a fifth-year program for students who have completed academic requirements and benefit from one-year of transition. The experience is highly individualized, including job skills and the ability to take college classes at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. Support provided to students includes reading a syllabus, navigating a college campus, advocating for services, notetakers, and interpreters).

Students receive an array of services through ASD’s Transition Services Department, including interest inventories and career assessments, seminar classes focused on communication, self-advocacy, legal rights and responsibility, connection to state agency services, postsecondary guidance (including college preparatory planning and/or vocational/employment training). Transition assessments

include Links, O\*Net Interest Profile, Career Interest Profile, Myer's Briggs, Career One Stop, Ohio Means Jobs, Map It Assessments, Learning and Study Strategies Inventory for self-determination, Learning Style Inventories, and My Next Move.

Students have many leadership training opportunities with outside organizations, including the Junior Connecticut Association of the Deaf, the Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum, and the National Association of the Deaf Youth Leadership Camp.

The school affords teachers and related service personnel with opportunities to access off-site professional development activities of individual interest at no cost.

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

#### **Standard J: Health and Safety**

A private facility shall conduct monthly emergency drills that shall include one crisis response drill other than a fire drill once every three months.

**Issue(s):** A review of emergency drill records indicated that fire drills were documented to occur monthly. However, there was no evidence that every third drill was a crisis drill.

**Corrective Action:** On or before April 30, 2022, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will maintain emergency drill documentation evidencing that every third drill will be a crisis drill.

### **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are offered to ASD:

Remove the privacy screen from the entry door glass of the room referred to as the "chill room" so students have clear visibility from within. Remove the inside, doorknob lock device from the "chill room" even though not currently utilized as such. Complete these modifications prior to utilizing the room as a "chill room" in accordance with the Approved Private Special Education Program Facility Check requirements.

In addition to the current practice of maintaining an administrative professional development record, maintain documentation of all professional development and training participation in individual personnel files. Be sure to include the date, topic, and duration of each activity as well as employee signature of attendance and certificates of completion if provided.

Consider increasing the frequency of administrator informal classroom visits. Teachers reported they "miss administration coming into the classrooms to say hello to the students."

Remove items that are not being utilized or relevant to current instruction from below and on top of student's desks in the science classroom observed—it appeared "busy and disorganized."

Consider developing an action plan during "academic hub" meetings, which identifies the issue(s) discussed and a timeline for addressing actions. During interviews, staff expressed the necessity for "increased communication among middle management in communicating needs to the academic hub" as well as a need for increased communication between staff members.

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Circulate a survey to education and related service personnel for the purpose of soliciting professional development and training topics of interest specific to their discipline. Education staff within the autism program expressed an interest in activities focused on autism spectrum disorders. Staff said, “professional development meetings are not always specific or goal oriented.”

Provide opportunities for teachers and related service personnel to visit and observe public school classrooms as well as other nonpublic school settings where students may transition to upon a planning and placement team recommendation. A clear understanding of the expectations, (academic and social/emotional) instructional models, and level of expected self-advocacy will assist in preparing students for this transition.

Within fifteen working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether your program agrees with the report and accepts the delineated corrective action plan. Upon receipt of ASD’s written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through April 30, 2027, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to the ASD:

- Approved Ages to Serve:** Three through twenty-two years old
- Approved Grades to Serve:** Pre-K through twelve
- Approved Student Capacity:** Two hundred fifteen students
- Approval Expiration Date:** April 30, 2027

cc: Paula Gladu-Morabito, Education Director