




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Kim Holley, Chief Administrator  
Ben Bronz Academy (West Hartford)

**FROM:** Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant   
Bureau of Special Education

**DATE:** June 8, 2020

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

On February 4, 2020, an evaluation team visited the special education program Ben Bronz Academy in West Hartford to conduct an on-site review for re-approval. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Ana Wittig, Education Director, Oak Hill School; and
- Joshua Robinson, Director of Special Education, Windsor Locks Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on January 29, 2020, Dori Papa (BSE lead education consultant) reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Ms. Papa has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration.

At the exit conference on February 4, 2020, 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; and
- Termination of enrollment.

**1. Commendations:**

- The overall climate and culture of the program is warm, positive, and reinforcing. There is a culture of respect between staff and students.
- The program site is spacious, organized, comfortable, and well maintained.
- Staff views administration as consistently supportive and equally committed to implementing individual programs that result in the highest level of academic benefit to each student.

- The program has technological resources including access to individual laptop computers for students and mediators (teachers), access to Google Read & Write tools, Smartboards, new document cameras and projectors in each classroom, and updated keyboards and headphones for assessments and daily use.
- Each student has his/her own laptop computer used for research opportunities and to engage in academic progress monitoring.
- There is a strong, shared mission among staff to prepare students for transition back to their public school. The program has a 30-month average length of stay demonstrating that it has experienced success in transitioning students to a less restrictive instructional setting.
- Academic instruction and interventions are data driven. The program employs a strong data collection process through a variety of data collection and analysis tools (Dibels, Fountas and Pinnell, and Cyberslate). Individual student data as well as trend data are reviewed frequently and with regularity.
- An annual compilation of the professional development (PD) activities in which each staff member has participated is well documented in a general PD binder and available in each staff file reviewed. A schoolwide PD system is integrated into the school week (half days each Friday). Staff members have opportunities to seek outside PD activities of individual interest.
- The teacher interview responses evidenced their solid understanding of the individualized education program (IEP) process.
- The team observed and described the demeanor of teachers, teacher assistants, and all other staff members as “impeccable, kind, low key, and exhibited excellent interaction with students.”
- Staff members have opportunities for career advancement within the program.
- Staff members may request to attend PD and training specific to their individual interest(s).
- Overall, staff expressed they are enthusiastic about their jobs and excited about students’ academic and behavioral progress.

## **2. Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

**Standard B: Administration** - A private facility shall have a written policy to assure that it complies with the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Public Law 108-446; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act 20 United States Code Section 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99, Sections 10-76a to 10-76q, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) and the regulations adopted thereunder; Public Act (PA) 96-246 (reporting of child abuse); PA 11-232 – An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws; PA 12-99 – An Act Concerning the Reporting of Children Placed in Seclusion; and all other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and local requirements.

**Issue:** As required by the CGS. Section 10-222c, as amended by PA 16-67, each approved private special education program is required to obtain the information listed on the employment verification form from all current or former employer(s) of the applicants hired on or after July 1, 2016, if such employer was a local regional board of education, a governing council of a state or local charter school, an interdistrict magnet school operator, or if the employment caused the applicant to have contact with children. Applicants are required under the law to provide a prospective employer with the name, address, and telephone number of all current or former employers that meet the above criteria. Information may be collected either through a written communication or telephonically.

**Issue:** There was no evidence a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form was completed for two employees hired after July 1, 2016.

**Corrective Action:** Provide an attestation to the BSE on or before July 30, 2020, that the State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form will be obtained for each new employee and that upon obtaining completed forms, the program's chief administrator or education director will make appropriate contact with previous or current employers.

**Standard F: Program Requirements** - The local school district is responsible for the development and appropriateness of a student's IEP and any changes made in that IEP. Each private facility shall request an IEP from the placing local education agency (LEA) prior to enrolling the student in the private facility. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student. The IEP presented by the LEA serves as the basis for admission and should identify the current performance levels of the student, the appropriate specialized instruction, and required related services. Each private facility should participate in the planning and placement (PPT) meeting that discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to actual placement.

**Issue:** In five (5) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, related services indicated on the IEP were not separated/broken out to specify if the delivery of service is provided on a 1:1, small group basis, or other means.

**Corrective Action:** While the program has initiated a process and procedure for the review of an IEP received from the LEA and has identified in writing the need to make corrections, there remains a need for further scrutiny of the IEP document. Submit to the BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled, demonstrating careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrating the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes.

**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:** In reviewing emergency drill records, 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 August 30, 2020, submit to the BSE an attestation that the program will maintain emergency drill documentation evidencing that every third drill will be a crisis drill.

### 3. **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are offered to Ben Bronz Academy:

- Provide students with increased enrichment and vocational opportunities that are interest driven, community based, involve service learning, and provide a less restrictive community setting to practice learned social skills.
- Continue moving forth with the trial plan for the provision of contracted psychological services to support the emotional needs of students as described.
- Consider increasing opportunities for student-to-student discourse and interaction during instructional and social activities.
- Consider increasing the planning and collaboration time at the team level to include teachers, teacher assistants, related service providers, and behavior analysts.
- Consider the provision of selected PD aligned with outcomes of individual teacher Connecticut System for Educator Evaluation and Development evaluations.

Within 15 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 your written agreement to, and acceptance of the report, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2025, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Ben Bronz Academy:

<b>Approved Ages to Serve:</b>	7–21 years old
<b>Approved Grades to Serve:</b>	2–12
<b>Approved Student Capacity:</b>	60
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2025

DP:dpp  
cc: Christina Lamphere, Education Director