




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Pamela Potemri, Ed.D., Chief Administrator  
Connecticut Coastal Academy

**FROM:** Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant   
Bureau of Special Education

**DATE:** June 15, 2021

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

**Please note:** This Approved Private Special Education Program approval review was conducted remotely due to the current public health and safety requirements resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. All required activities and components, as defined in the *Principles, Procedures and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*, were conducted remotely and in accordance with the approval process.

On March 23, 2021, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of Connecticut Coastal Academy (CTCA) special education program. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Judy Benson-Clarke, Director of Pupil Personnel, Scotland Public Schools; and
- Tina Mannarino, Education Director, River Run Academy at the Susan Wayne Center of Excellence.

During a previous virtual site visit on March 16, 2021, Ms. Hayles reviewed select education files of students. In addition, Ms. Hayles reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your staff, as well as personnel files.

At the exit conference on March 23, 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; and
- Termination of enrollment.

**1. Commendations:**

- Staff are committed to the vision and mission of the program to assist young people in creating lives of meaning purpose and joy—ensuring that students have the tools and skills to transition into adulthood.
- An overall culture of respect is clearly the norm throughout the program and was apparent in the level and manner of student engagement across lessons observed.
- The program employs research and evidence-based practices and approaches to teaching, learning, and emotional regulation. Decision making is data based and goals setting is individualized and focused on measurable outcomes.
- Person-centered planning is implemented through Making Action Plans (MAPS). MAPS creates a roadmap of goals, obstacles, and supports, as well as, engagement in community-based relationship building and assistance in collaborating with, and accessing, adult service providers.
- Small class sizes, personalized academic coaching, and flexible scheduling within the school day provide a unique opportunity for students to realize their potential.
- Students benefit from strong collaboration and communication among teachers, clinicians, and families.
- The program implements multiple platforms for instruction and includes units of study that are aligned to state-approved curriculum standards. Curriculum standards are created utilizing the Edgenuity platform (for scope and sequence)—supported with teacher-designed activities and interventions.
- Student’s weekly progress monitoring is also in place.
- In addition to providing classroom imbedded clinical supports through a co-teaching model, the program provides individual counseling and specialized support groups.
- The program implements a trauma-informed, social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, which focuses on building skills in the areas of self- and social awareness, relationship building, decision making, and self-management.
- The program’s professional development plan includes activities, which focus on promoting academic rigor, personal wellness that supports efficacy, and developing a primary focus on SEL. The program has adopted the Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional (SCERTS) model. The SCERTS model is a research-based educational approach and multidisciplinary framework that directly addresses the core challenges faced by children and persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder and related disabilities and their families.
- The program strives to access community-based activities and opportunities for the students enrolled and ensures that students remain engaged in community-based service activities.

- A variety of clubs and programs are available to students based on their interest (currently include video production, podcasts, robotics, art, music, and cooking).
- The program has integrated some unique vocational opportunities for students. These opportunities include a relationship with The Home Builders Institute, Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (PACT) program. The PACT program provides students with opportunities for learning and eventually pursuing licensing, in areas such as carpentry, brick laying, solar installation, and landscaping. Connecticut Coastal Academy also recently purchased a food truck and is hiring a culinary instructor to oversee this initiative and make this opportunity fully operational.
- The program has implemented an internet literacy curriculum, which promotes digital citizenship among the students.
- Parent connections are supported by the regularly updated Website, a weekly newsletter, “The Compass,” which provides updates and information related to classroom activities, school-wide projects, and program goals and accomplishments.

## 2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

### **I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel**

Each private facility shall ensure that all special education program administrators, instructional, and related services personnel providing special education and related services who were hired after September 1, 1980, shall hold proper state certification for the position held, which shall be on file with the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBE). This information shall be provided to representatives of the CSBE in a timely manner and certified through the staff report in the Educator Data Systems. Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Section (10-145d-610(c)). Administrators of the facility's special education program shall hold either a current teacher certificate in comprehensive special education, a related service area, or in an area of a specific disability, AND an intermediate administrator certificate.

**Issue:** The program currently employs an identified administrator with the “assistant director” title who does not hold the required certification. The identified administrator holds a current intermediate administrator certificate (092), while a current certificate in comprehensive special education, a related service area, or in an area of specific disability was not available at the time of the site visit.

**Corrective Action:** On or before June 30, 2021, submit to the BSE documentation that the assistant director holds the appropriate current certifications in both intermediate administration AND comprehensive special education, a related service, or in an area of specific disability.

### **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 (IDEA), 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 Code of Federal Regulations Part 99; Connecticut General Statutes Sections 10-76a to 1076q, inclusive, and the current Connecticut regulations adopted thereunder, related to reporting of child abuse and neglect and bullying; and the prohibition of the use of restraint and seclusion in schools, and all other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and local requirements.

**Issue:** A current health inspection conducted by local officials was not available at the time of the site visit. While the program has submitted documentation of private inspections addressing elements of a typical health inspection completed to acquire a certificate of occupancy upon opening the current facility, the local health department has not availed themselves for completion of a required health inspection and have indicated that such an inspection is not within their scope of service.

**Corrective Actions:** Submit to the BSE a copy of a current health inspection conducted by the local health department upon receipt. The CSDE will continue to pursue clarification and cooperation of State Health Department officials to explore the basis for the lack of cooperation on the part of local authorities in an effort to assure that the program is able to meet this requirement.

### **3. Recommendations:**

It is recommended that your program consider taking the following action:

- Continue to expand community engagement and connections that support the mission and vision of the program.
- Explore additional or alternate use of space to accommodate the expansion of instruction and services provided to students as the program grows.
- Continue to address the need to develop additional policies and procedures through weekly executive team meetings.
- Ensure that the conduct of monthly emergency drills includes documentation that every third drill conducted is something other than a fire drill (i.e., evacuation, shelter in place, etc.).
- Explore with staff the options to adopt the cohort model implemented due to COVID-19 mitigation strategies moving forward based on the positive feedback from staff regarding its implementation.
- Continue to develop a breadth of vocational opportunities available to students based on their individual interests and community resources.
- Ensure that an appropriate number of employees are appropriately licensed, to engage in transporting students to and from school activities in vehicles, which meet Department of Motor Vehicles' requirements as school activity vehicles.

Pamela Potemri, Ed.D., Chief Administrator  
Preliminary Evaluation Report – Connecticut Coastal Academy  
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program  
June 15, 2021

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 and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2026, will be submitted to the Acting Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Connecticut Coastal Academy:

<b>Approved Ages to Serve:</b>	11–22 years old (Grades 6–12)
<b>Approved Student Capacity:</b>	42 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2026