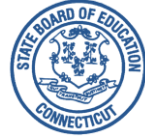





STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Jeffrey Forman, Chief Administrator
Intensive Education Academy

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

DATE: December 16, 2020

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 *Policies, Procedures and Standards for Approved Private Special Education Programs*, were conducted remotely and in accordance with the approval process.

On November 18, 2020, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of the Intensive Education Academy special education program. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mark Hedrick, Education Director, Oak Hill School; and
- Stacey Heiligenthaler, Ph.D., Special Education Director, Norwalk Public Schools.

During a previous virtual site visit on November 16, 2020, 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 November 18, 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 program’s chief administrator exhibits an outstanding level of enthusiasm, care, and dedication in his leadership role as evidenced through his extensive knowledge and integral involvement in all aspects of the program—as well as strong support of staff, students, and families. His attentive interactions, warmth, and positivity penetrate throughout the program.
- Staff are characterized as dedicated, encouraging, and positive in their interactions with students. Interview respondents reported that the longevity of staff employment is indicative of the program’s quality leadership.
- The program has a strong culture of collaboration. Teacher and related service provider interview respondents described the high level of collaboration and teamwork involving all stakeholders as a program strength, particularly during the individualized education program (IEP) development process in which parents are very involved. There is daily communication between teachers and families.
- The overall climate throughout the program is cheerful, welcoming, positive, and reinforcing. A positive culture and climate has been established and is evidenced by mutually respectful relationships among students and between staff and students.
- The program has recently completed building a new multi-acre outdoor education area consisting of a lawn area for physical education classes, a fitness trail with outdoor fitness equipment, and a playscape area with play equipment, music, and sensory stations.
- The observation team described classrooms as spacious, clean, colorful, bright, neat, and text rich with many visuals displayed on the walls. All materials are very organized and readily accessible to students.
- The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction that appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student and aligned with IEP goals and objectives. Project-based learning was observed during an English Language Arts lesson in which art, music, and technology components were embedded. A rigorous project-based curriculum is also integrated via the greenhouse and community culinary room.
- Programming is in place to meet a wide variety of student needs across age ranges including functional academics, life-skill-based instruction and college-bound academics. The program has a “transition education academy” within the school building that continues to focus on academics for students 18 years old and older—while providing in-house and off-site job experiences. Additionally, the life skills program provides students with opportunities to engage in onsite activities via grounds keeping, the school store, and coffee cart for the purpose of building upon academic and functional life skills.
- Classroom observations evidenced that staff members provide students with consistent and clear expectations, positive praise, and reinforcement.
- The observation team reported evidence of teachers differentiating instructional delivery processes through the use of auditory and visual presentation to meet the individual preferential learning modalities of students.

- Classroom observations confirmed the implementation of highly individualized academic instruction and access to necessary accommodations. Academic instruction and interventions are data driven. The program uses a comprehensive data collection system called Catalyst. Individual student data as well as trend data are reviewed often and with regularity.
- The program has a strong interdisciplinary approach delivered by an array of educational and related service staff. Each of the twelve classrooms is staffed with a special education teacher, teacher assistants for whole classroom, and 1:1 student support. Additionally, the program provides the support of a school psychologist, two social workers, two speech and language pathologists (SLPs), one SLP assistant, one occupational therapist, one certified occupational therapy assistant, two board certified behavior analysts, two behavior interventionists, and a full-time nurse.
- The program offers a holistic educational experience including art, music, physical education, health, and social skills instruction.
- The program has invested in technology that supports teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. All classrooms are equipped with Promethean Boards (interactive white boards) that interact with student and teacher computers. Students benefit from individual Chrome Books, email accounts, and access to Google products such as Google classroom enabling remote learners to participate with in-person learners.
- The program has an average length of stay of 28 months—evidencing it has experienced success in transitioning students to a less restrictive instructional setting. The program collaborates and coordinates with the local education agency (LEA) for a seamless reintegration for students into their home school.

2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

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 from the placing LEA an IEP prior to the enrollment of 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 team (PPT) meeting that discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to placement.

Issue(s): In three (3) 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, or other basis.

Corrective Action: Submit to 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 (1) crisis response drill other than a fire drill once every three (3) 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 December 30, 2020, submit to 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 Intensive Education Academy:

- Maintain and refine the process of reviewing IEPs for appropriateness and accuracy. Ensure that related services provided on an individual and small group basis are broken out/separated.
- Consider increasing the participation of paraeducators in professional development (PD) activities with teachers, recognizing that under the Every Student Succeeds Act, paraeducators now have a more integral role in the planning, programming, and implementation of IEPs for addressing the diverse needs of students.
- Consider expanding upon opportunities for more focused PD activities during the half-day Wednesday, “collaboration time.”
- Consider developing a more defined program mission statement that encompasses the component of interdisciplinary collaboration as key to meeting the diverse needs of students.
- Move forward with the plan to explore, expand, and enhance the program’s literacy infrastructure although the program utilizes the Wilson Reading System.

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, 2025 will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Intensive Education Academy:

- Approved Ages to Serve:** 5–22 years old (Grades K–12)
- Approved Student Capacity:** 84 students
- Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2025