




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Suzanne Letso, Chief Administrator  
Milestones Behavioral Services, Inc.

**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 March 5, 2020, an evaluation team visited the Milestones Behavioral Services, Inc. (Milestones) special education program sites in Milford and Orange to conduct on-site reviews for re-approval. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Gwen Killheffer, Education Director, Soltera Academy; and
- Aimee Turner, Director of Special Education, Wallingford Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on March 2, 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 March 5, 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 teachers interviewed reported that leadership is strongly supportive, always available, and very involved in supporting the instruction and day-to-day programming of all students.
- It was observed that staff interactions with each other inside the classrooms were “awesome.” There is a culture of respect between staff and students and a high degree of comradeship was also noted.

- Staff members provide students with clear expectations, positive praise, and reinforcement.
- The program has a strong culture of collaboration. It was observed that board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs) communicate closely with classroom staff providing a high level of feedback to the teacher.
- Classrooms are spacious, bright, and very organized with colorful labeling. Each student's designated independent working area is identified with his/her photo. Each student has his/her own cabinet and knew exactly where to go to obtain his/her materials.
- Parent communication is a program strength. Teachers and BCBAs communicate frequently with parents, usually on a daily basis. Teachers, BCBAs, and assistant clinicians make home visits at least one time per month to collaborate and support families in an after school home program. When parents request information on specific training topics of interest, the program is accommodating.
- Discrete trial analysis is not only used within classrooms, but opportunities are also provided in natural community settings.
- Staff interviewed reported that they are provided with an abundance of professional development (PD) and support. In addition to the required eighteen (18) hours per year, external PD activities are also supported for all levels of staff who are then provided with leadership opportunities through presenting information learned to the Milestone's team.
- The program utilizes a comprehensive data collection system called Catalyst. Each staff member has an iPad where the student's individualized education program (IEP) Goals and Objectives are placed into the system in a task analysis style—allowing for constant implementation and monitoring of the IEP goals and objectives. Targets are placed into maintenance when they are mastered so new targets can be opened to ensure that students are challenged at an appropriate level. The data can be accessed and analyzed through graphs, which are shared with all involved stakeholders.
- Continued education for staff is strongly encouraged by administration and partial tuition reimbursement is an available benefit. Staff members have opportunities for career advancement within the program, which has a positive impact on the ability to retain staff.
- The program has invested in technology that supports teachers in their instruction and students in their learning and communication. Each student may access technology for the purpose of enhancing communication. Each teacher has a laptop computer for data collection purposes.
- Teacher and related service provider interview responses indicated a solid understanding of the IEP process and an appreciation of the need for collaboration and teamwork. Teachers and BCBAs strongly collaborate particularly during the IEP development process.
- 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 I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support** - State and national criminal history records checks of staff who work directly with students shall be submitted within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment (Section 10-221d of Connecticut General Statutes).

**Issue:** In one (1) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, one (1) did not meet the requirement to submit a criminal history records check within 30 days of hire.

**Corrective Action:** Provide a statement of assurance that the program has a process in place to ensure that fingerprinting and background checks are submitted in a timely manner as required.

**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 another type of crisis drill at the 95 Wolf Harbor Road site.

**Corrective Action:** On or before June 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 Milestones:

- Consider hiring a full-time occupational and speech/language therapist, even though related services are delivered on a “push-in” basis provided by students’ local education agencies and consultation services take place between provider and staff immediately following the related service visits.
- Consider developing a plan for fading out 1:1 support as students achieve mastery of their goals.
- Consider purchasing Smartboards for the Post Road site.
- Consider utilizing a form of whole-class technology to encourage/facilitate student, group interaction.
- Consider scheduling additional time for teachers to collaborate with each other about curriculum and instructional strategies. Teachers interviewed reported they have adequate time to collaborate to discuss individual students, but they expressed that they would like more time to collaborate with each other to share instructional strategies.
- Consider expanding the curriculum to provide opportunities for students to increase or expand their exposure to the arts and sciences and other content areas.
- Move forward with the plan to explore the integration of an employee assistance program into the employee benefit package to attract and retain employees.

- Consider providing increased opportunities for student-to-student interaction/discourse within classrooms, even though there is time for students to interact daily within a group setting (lunch and gross motor activities in the gymnasium).

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 Milestones:

**Approved Ages to Serve:** 3–21 years old

**Approved Grades to Serve:** PK–12

**Approved Student Capacity:** 112

**Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2025

DP:dpp

cc: Lisa Gregory, Education Director