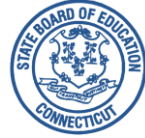




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Mr. Brian Lynch, Chief Administrator
Pathways Academy

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

DATE: June 15, 2022

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

On January 27, 2022, an evaluation team (the team) visited Pathways Academy to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mr. Gary Hunt, Regional Vice President New England, High Road Schools; and
- Mr. Robert Swan, Director of Pupil Services, East Haven Public Schools.

During a previous site visit on January 25, 2022, 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 January 27, 2022, the team shared its impressions and preliminary findings and the team reviewed the following areas of the special education program:

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:

When interviewed, teachers and related service staff described administration, specifically the education director, as highly organized, responsive, caring, knowledgeable and integrally involved in all aspects of the program, highly visible, and always accessible to provide staff support. Additionally, staff shared that administration has an excellent rapport with teachers and students. Staff appreciates administration soliciting and valuing their input.

Overall, the program has a very positive climate. Teachers' and related service providers' employment longevity ranges from six to thirty-two years. All staff interviewed expressed that they "love the administration and working here."

The staff demonstrates a strong commitment to the well-being of each student. The team observed an excellent rapport between teachers and students. Teachers responded appropriately and effectively to students who exhibited dysregulated behavior during classroom observations. The team shared that overall, there is a sense of positivity in the classroom environment.

Staff shares an appreciation of the need for collaboration and teamwork, which is fostered by leadership. All staff interviewed noted an outstanding level of collaboration, communication, and consistency relative to the development and implementation of appropriate social, emotional, behavioral, and academic programming for each student enrolled. Administration shared that "staff work together as one—all on the same page with the same philosophy for supporting the needs of students."

Classroom observations evidenced teachers had identified goals and objectives that were clearly stated and posted during the course of the lesson (lesson content aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards). Students observed were engaged in their instruction and demonstrated a willingness to take risks. To ensure a student's seamless reintegration into their public schools, teachers communicate with some sending local education agencies (LEAs) to share curriculum.

The program has a designated transition coordinator who has developed community-based partnerships with the Foodbank, Goodwill, TJ Maxx, Burlington, CVS, and Walgreens. The program provides an annual career fair in which colleges and organizations attend to speak with students (including Lincoln Tech and Porter and Chester Institute). Pathways Academy affords students the opportunity to participate in a Driver's Education Permit Preparation course.

The team noted that paraeducator support was available as identified in student individualized education programs (IEPs). A paraeducator provided an appropriate level of support when a student became frustrated and exited the classroom. The paraeducator gave effective redirection and the student rejoined the classroom and re-engaged in the lesson.

The program is housed in an "older" building but was described as clean and organized with spacious classrooms having a lot of windows and natural light. Desks/furniture placement was conducive for enabling teachers to circulate around the classroom and provide student support.

The program implements the principles of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). The schoolwide PBIS system supports are evident through visual rules and routines posted throughout the school. The consistent language, tone, and volume that staff used when delivering verbal prompts and expectations to students, promote a predictable environment.

An annual compilation of the professional development activities in which each staff member has participated is well-documented and available in each staff file reviewed. The program utilizes the RELIAS Learning Management System to track professional development and

personnel training. Education staff is afforded the opportunity to attend outside professional development and training activities of individual interest and relative to their roles at no cost.

Family communication is a program strength. Teachers routinely make weekly calls to families to share concerns as well as successes. The school social worker makes home visits to re-engage students who do not consistently attend school. Families are invited to various school-based events, including open house in October, quarterly honor roll recognition ceremonies, eighth grade moving up, and graduation ceremonies.

Standard Deficiencies:

Pathways Academy must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

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 LEA prior to student enrollment and at least annually thereafter. 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, which discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to student enrollment. For students placed by other agencies, the private facility should obtain an IEP after placement as soon as feasible from the district having educational jurisdiction.

Issue: In two of five IEPs reviewed, the related services were not appropriately, reflected on page eleven—counseling services were not clearly identified as being provided individually or within a small group.

Corrective Action: Implement a procedure to utilize upon receipt of an IEP after participating in a PPT meeting. Said procedure shall ensure that all the information in the IEP is complete and accurate; allows the ability for documenting a process, to ensure the IEP accurately reflects PPT consensus; and that Pathways Academy can implement the supports and services outlined in the document as written (i.e., require clarification of all related service whether it is provided individually or within a group setting).

Submit to the BSE copies of the next three IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. The copies shall demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness (including, but not limited to, clearly identifying related service delivery model—individual or small group). Illustrate written notification to the district, to request necessary changes.

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel - Each private facility shall ensure the following:

The private facility shall maintain a permanent individual personnel file for each employee and shall ensure said file is confidential. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants. In addition, the private facility shall ensure the applicants submit to a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Abuse and Neglect Registry records check before hiring staff who will work directly with students.

The private facility shall obtain the information listed on the *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form from ALL current or former employer(s) of an applicant if such employer was a local or regional board of education, an APSEP, 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. For staff who will work directly with students, state and national criminal history records check (fingerprinting) shall be submitted within thirty days of hire and on file within sixty days from the date of employment. Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Section 10-221d.

Issue 1: In four of five personnel files reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing completion of a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form prior to employment (for employees hired after July 1, 2016.)

Corrective Action: On or before June 30, 2022, submit to the BSE attestation that Pathways Academy will obtain a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form for each new employee and upon obtaining the completed forms, the program's chief administrator or education director will make appropriate contact with previous or current employers.

Issue 2: In two of five personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a request for a DCF background check was submitted within thirty days of hire for two employees. DCF background checks for the two employees were conducted but not within the required thirty days of hire.

Corrective Action: On or before, June 30, 2022, submit to the BSE attestation that a DCF background check will be submitted within thirty days of hire and on file within sixty days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-221d.

Develop an index or organizational format to consistently, use for personnel files. Said format is to ensure that all required components are contained in each personnel file, including, but not limited to, pre-employment work references, criminal records check, fingerprinting check, DCF background check, annual performance evaluations, and a *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for personnel hired after July 1, 2016, in accordance with Public Act 16-67.

Standard J: Health and Safety - A private facility shall conduct monthly emergency drills that include one crisis response drill other than a fire drill once every three months.

Issue(s): In reviewing emergency drill records, documented fire drills occurred monthly. However, there was no evidence that every third drill was a crisis drill.

Corrective Action: On or before June 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 BSE offers the following recommendations to Pathways Academy:

Develop and circulate a survey to education and related service personnel, to solicit professional development and training topics of interest specific to their discipline. Align professional

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development and training topics to teacher and related service personnel evaluation results, particularly those identified as areas of continued growth.

Explore, invest, and expand technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. When the program has acquired the new technology, provide appropriate training and support for teachers. Although classrooms are equipped with a projector, the program's technology is in need of updating.

Consider providing 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 upon a PPT 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.

Consider training additional program staff to administer student medication. It was shared that an individual who had this duty no longer in service with Pathways Academy.

Move forth with the plan to pursue a grant for developing a "cardio/gym" room and/or to develop a connection and contract with a local gym to utilize their facility.

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 Pathway Academy's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the BSE will submit a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2027, to the Commissioner of Education.

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

- Approved Ages to Serve:** 12 to 22 years old
- Approved Grades to Serve:** grades 6 through 12
- Approved Student Capacity:** 32 students
- Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2027

cc: William Millard, Education Director