




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Tina Mannarino, Chief Administrator
River Run Academy at Susan Wayne Center of Excellence

FROM: Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant 
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: December 14, 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 River Run Academy at Susan Wayne Center of Excellence (River Run Academy) special education program. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Shawn Cyr, Education Director, Natchaug Hospital;
- Katherine Matz, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, New Fairfield Public Schools; and
- Sarah Kelly, Administrative Intern, New Fairfield Public Schools.

During a previous virtual site visit on November 6, 2020, Ms. Hayles reviewed the education files of five (5) students as well as personnel files. In addition, Ms. Hayles 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 provides a high staff to student ratio in support of each student’s need for individualization and differentiation of instruction within the context of trauma-informed care. Affiliated residential services afford students with complex needs, opportunities to benefit from a comprehensive trauma-informed approach to developing self-regulation skills and reintegration with family and community.
- The program provides academic programming for both day and residential students. Student outcomes are positively impacted by the implementation of the Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC) framework implemented in the residential and day school programs, which focuses on building positive relationships, learning self-regulation skills, and identifying strengths.
- Staff demonstrates a student-centered approach and a high degree of commitment and collaboration in providing for the unique needs of each student enrolled in the program.
- The education facility provides a welcoming, student-oriented environment with appropriately sized classroom spaces, a full-size gymnasium, and additional spaces to accommodate student fitness, student break time needs, and sensory needs as well as counseling and nursing offices and a growing library area.
- The facilities and grounds provide students with a holistic learning environment that addresses academic, vocational, and leisure activities. The expansion of the campus farm, the adventure course, a therapeutic obstacle course, and a SMART room designed to provide students with therapeutic sensory experiences, support the program’s goals to assist students in gaining courage and confidence and provides hands-on learning opportunities.
- The program’s strength-based mission encourages family participation in the student’s treatment program and provides hope, health, and safety to students impacted by trauma.
- The recently hired education director has had a significant impact by improving communication within the program and introducing initiatives and trainings that support the enhancement of assessment procedures and academic rigor.
- Students benefit from a differentiated approach to instruction and access to technology.
- Transition and vocational opportunities and activities are available to students through expanded options on campus as well as resources within the community.
- Students and staff benefit from the availability of support provided by a full-time psychiatrist.
- A high degree of collaboration among staff to develop individualized education programs (IEPs) was noted.

- Individual treatment plans (ITPs) are developed for students. The ITP contents are used to develop the social emotional goals and objectives of the IEP and/or documented as such for residential students.
- All areas within the school building are equipped with video cameras used for monitoring student behavior and student and staff interaction—allowing for the determination of any necessary interventions for students or for supervision of staff.

2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard F: Program Requirements

A private facility shall have a written description of the education program for each student as defined in the IEP. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student.

Issue: In five (5) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, one (1) or more required elements of the IEP was not accurately reflected or the IEP document was not comprehensive in defining the degree of services that are essential and currently provided to address the needs of the student. Elements or additional clarifications needed include the following:

- In five (5) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, the implementers of IEP services identified on page 11 of the IEP was incomplete (i.e., did not include a general education teacher or the support of additional staff such as teacher assistants or 1:1 aides, in addition to a special education teacher).
- In four (4) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, the nature of a student’s behavioral/social emotional needs and the special considerations and supports required to address those needs (page 10), was not descriptive or clear in reflecting the level of support provided through treatment plans or the schoolwide positive supports provided. When a child’s behavior impedes his/her learning or that of others, the planning and placement team (PPT) must consider the use of positive behavioral supports and interventions and identify those supports and interventions recommended to address behavior—beyond how those needs may be addressed in goals and objectives.
- In four (4) of (5) IEPs reviewed, the provision of related services such as “counseling” or speech and language services did not delineate the frequency and duration of 1:1 services versus those to be provided within a small group setting.

Corrective Actions Required: Provide evidence that a careful review of the district generated IEPs for students enrolled has taken place. Submit to the BSE copies of the Special Considerations page of the IEP (page 10) and the Service Delivery page (page 11) for the next three (3) IEPs provided by the district and reviewed and accepted by the program for implementation. If appropriate, provide a copy of the notification and a request to the district to make the appropriate changes should the IEP provided not completely or accurately articulate the services and settings for the instruction agreed upon at the PPT.

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel

A state and national criminal history records check (fingerprinting) 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 [CGS]).

Issue: The staff file review yielded evidence that two (2) current providers of services do not have evidence that fingerprinting was conducted as required within 30 days of hire.

Corrective Action Required: On or before January 31, 2021, review staff files to ensure that all staff files include documentation that fingerprinting has been submitted within 30 days of hire. In the absence of such documentation, complete the submission on or before January 31, 2021, and submit evidence of that submission to the BSE.

Standard B: Administration

A private facility shall have a written policy to assure that it complies with the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Public Law 101-476; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, Sections 10-76a to 10-76q, inclusive, of the CGS and the regulations adopted thereunder related to reporting of child abuse and neglect, bullying, and the use of restraint and seclusion in schools-and all other current and relevant federal and state laws and regulations and local requirements.

Issue: A review of the policy and procedures documents submitted as part of the application indicate that policies around the use of restraint and seclusion and requirements related to suspension are not aligned with current Connecticut statute and/or required procedures—specifically, the use of restraint and seclusion is described as part of the behavior management policy and the suspension policy does not indicate that the local education agency is appropriately notified.

Corrective action required: On or before January 31, 2021, submit a letter of attestation indicating that a comprehensive review of River Run Academy’s policies and procedures have been reviewed and reflect current statutes, regulations, and practices for APSEPs. Submit to BSE a copy of the revised policies related to the issues identified.

3. Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered to River Run Academy:

- Continue to develop opportunities to increase communication and collaboration among staff to improve continuity of services across settings.
- Continue to seek opportunities to achieve the vision of “one schoolhouse” by integrating the day school and residential school programs in order to capitalize on access to practices, personnel, and resources—ensuring equity in the resources available to students based on their needs rather than their living situations.
- Review annually, the policies applicable to the River Run Academy to ensure alignment with current practices and requirements of Connecticut State Statute or regulation.

Preliminary Evaluation Report – River Run Academy at Susan Wayne Center of Excellence
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program
December 14, 2020

- Consider expanding professional development activities to include opportunities for instructional staff to observe and connect with general and special education teachers in public school settings to provide a frame of reference around expectations and academic rigor.
- Consider connecting with public school providers to offer the expertise of River Run Academy staff in employing the ARC framework in addressing the provision of trauma informed care.

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 River Run Academy:

Approved Ages to Serve:	10–22 years old (Grades 5–12)
Approved Student Capacity:	50 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2025