



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Stephen Bell, Chief Administrator
The Foundation School-Milford

FROM: Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant ^{SP}
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: June 17, 2024

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

On March 7, 2024, an evaluation team visited The Foundation School-Milford (Foundation-Milford), to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Cheryl Kissel, Director of Special Services, Bethany Public Schools; and
- Krystyna Pasquarello, Education Director, Arch Bridge School.

During a previous site visit on March 4, 2024, 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 March 7, 2024, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The approval process included a review of the program's:

- 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.

Commendations:

Foundation-Milford is approved to serve students ages 15 through 22 with a high staff to student ratio (1:2 and 1:3). The program provides a language-based approach to learning and the support necessary to develop communication, academic, social, and physical competencies. Programming is strongly focused on the development of language skills and social proficiency.

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Program interviewees shared that the leadership (specifically the education directors) are highly collaborative, expediently with responsive, provide timely feedback, seek and value staff input, and “always have all hands-on-deck willing to help out.” The education staff’s employment longevity reflects effective leadership.

Staff interviewed described the program as “a family community engaging in great teamwork all invested in the social and academic growth of students.”

The school environment is described as bright, spacious, clean, and organized. Classrooms are large and colorful with student work and art products displayed. The facility is expansive and offers diverse activity opportunities for students, including a fitness room, a full professional kitchen where students engage in meal preparation, a large woodworking shop, art, music, horticulture, life skills, and technology classrooms.

A positive culture and climate are evidenced by positive respectful relationships among students, and between staff and students. The staff is characterized as warm, caring, dedicated, focused on developing positive relationships with students, and “go above and beyond” their assigned duties such as participating in after-school hours activities.

The observation team reported evidence of highly individualized, well-planned instruction aligned with Connecticut Core Standards, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Students observed were characterized as attentive and engaged in their learning.

The program provides students are provided with explicit and integrated social-emotional learning opportunities. Students participate in the social-emotional learning curriculum Zones of Regulation. All staff integrate social-emotional shared practices in with students throughout the school day.

Staff interviewed expressed an appreciation for professional development (PD) opportunities. A review of personnel files indicates diversity in PD activities evidenced through the program’s administrative plan. An individual professional development log is maintained for each Foundation-Milford staff member. Staff members are encouraged to attend training offered by the State Education Resource Center, Regional Educational Service Centers, and other outside PD opportunities of interest specific to their role and funded by the program.

Students are afforded opportunities to engage daily within the community depending on their readiness level to do so. They are provided individually, designed and implemented opportunities to participate in meaningful transition and/or community activities. Intentional/explicit instruction is provided throughout these experiences to encourage success in the community.

Staff interviewed described family engagement as a program strength. The program maintains frequent communication with parents and teachers and administration are readily available. Parents are integrally involved in the development of their child’s individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives. The program provides direct support and guidance is provided by helping families navigate adult services, Social Security, Medicaid, and the transition of exiting special education services. The program organizes special events throughout

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the year in which parents participate/attend, including a Fun Run, tournaments/competitions, talent shows, holiday gatherings, annual art show, plant sales, annual Boo Bash, Spirit Day, and various field trips.

Teachers interviewed shared that the “IEP development and progress monitoring process is a highly collaborative multidisciplinary approach.” Program staff implement a team approach regarding their contributions to the planning and placement team (PPT) in developing each student’s IEP.

Standard Deficiencies:

No standard deficiencies were cited.

Recommendations:

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Foundation-Milford:

Move forth with the plan to build a greenhouse to expand the program’s horticulture (gardening and plant-care) initiatives.

Consider investing in technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Staff interviewed shared the need for updated iPads with more storage capacity, projector screens, flatscreen televisions, a 3D printer in the print shop or learning center, and Smart Boards in additional classrooms.

Move forth with the plan to purchase new recreational and/or work-out equipment.

Familiarize program administration and professional staff with *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support 2023* for implementation beginning the 2024-25 school year. Training information can be accessed at [Talent Office \(ct.gov\)](https://talent.ct.gov).

Identify a paraeducator to participate on the program’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) in accordance with Public Act 23-159, Section 11. The committee shall consist of (1) at least one teacher, (2) at least one administrator, (3) at least one paraeducator, and (4) such other school personnel as the board deems appropriate. Consider having the program’s PDEC develop and circulate a survey to staff to align professional development (PD) opportunities with specific topics of interest.

Provide 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.

Maintain the practice/process of carefully reviewing each student’s IEP to ensure that the IEP is accurate, complete, and able to be fully implemented. Ensure that related services are documented under the appropriate section of the IEP under “Related Services.”

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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. Upon receipt of The Foundation School-Milford's written agreement, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2029, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to The Foundation School-Milford:

Approved Ages to Serve:	15 through 22 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	9–12th
Approved Enrollment Capacity:	30 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2029

cc: Nicholas Huskes, Education Director
Angela Piccerillo, Education Director