




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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

**FROM:** Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator   
Bureau of Special Education  
Approved Private Special Education Programs

**DATE:** March 15, 2019

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

On January 23, 2019, an evaluation team visited The Foundation School - Milford (Foundation - Milford) in order to conduct an on-site review for continuous approval as a Connecticut State Department of Education approved private special education program. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Amy Sjovall, Executive Director, High Road Schools; and
- Judy Benson Clark, Director of Special Education, Scotland Public School District.

During a previous on-site visit on January 16, 2019, Colleen Hayles reviewed the education files of five students. In addition, Ms. Hayles reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Foundation - Milford administration.

At the exit conference on January 23, 2019, 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.

**Commendations:**

- Students are provided with a language-based approach to learning and the supports necessary to develop communication, academic, social, and physical competencies. Programing focuses on the development of language skills and social proficiency.

- The program provides a high staff to student ratio (1:2 and 1:3), which supports each student's need for individualization and differentiation of instruction that emphasizes developing language and social proficiency in school, at home, and in the community. Students observed were characterized as attentive and engaged in their learning.
- Within each instructional setting, the implementation of both high-tech and low-tech accommodations appropriate to individual students was noted.
- Communication among the staff is highly supported by the program leadership. A high degree of collaboration between educators, support staff, and related service staff is evident in the various team and consultation meetings built into the weekly schedule. Staff characterized the school community as a "family." The overall culture within the program, communication among staff, and the supportive atmosphere established by administrators, contribute to the longevity of the program's professional staff.
- Program staff implement a team approach regarding their contributions to the planning and placement team in developing each student's individualized education program (IEP). The IEPs reviewed illustrated well-developed present levels of performance and goals and objectives, which were highly individualized and appropriately tied to areas of concern for each student. Observations provided a clear indication that the curriculum utilized is aligned with the Connecticut Standards and that IEPs are implemented with fidelity.
- The facility is expansive and provides areas housing fitness equipment as well as a large space for other physical activities, a full professional kitchen where students are engaged in meal preparation at various levels, and a large shop/art area where students can engage in various woodworking and expressive arts activities.
- The program provides opportunities for students to engage with the community on a daily basis depending on their ability and readiness to do so. Students are afforded individually designed and implemented opportunities to participate in meaningful transition and or community activities. Intentional/explicit instruction is provided to students along the way to encourage success in community.
- Positive, respectful, and trusting relationships are well-established between staff and students.
- Students have an opportunity to participate in a mentoring program with younger students attending The Foundation School - Orange program and can participate in the "LEO Club," (affiliated with the local Lions' Club) encouraging students to "give back" to their community. Students also have an opportunity to participate in a "Best Buddies" program with students from the Hopkins School four to five times a year.
- The program has an active Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, which informs the educator evaluation process as well as future professional development activities.
- The program does not typically support the use of individual aide support to students enrolled, recognizing the need for students to develop an appropriate level of independence within a highly supportive environment.

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

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

The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants and require that the applicant 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 the 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. Applicants are required under the law to provide a prospective employer with the name, address, and telephone number of all current or former employers that meet the above criteria. Information may be collected either through a written communication or telephonically. In addition, 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).

**Issue:** A review of staff files did not indicate that the appropriate background checks through the DCF Abuse and Neglect Registry or the national criminal history records check were completed within 30 days of hire and/or maintained in the staff files.

**Corrective Action Required:** Submit verification to the BSE that within 30 days of employment for the next two staff hired, the DCF registry and the national criminal database background checks and the employment verification were appropriately completed. Submit on or before June 30, 2019, an attestation that the conduct of all appropriate background checks and employment verification processes have become a part of the Foundation - Milford hiring practice.

### **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that your program consider taking the following action:

- Consider the addition of a school nurse position on a limited or part-time basis to provide consultation and the oversight of student health conditions; collaborate with staff; act as a resource for parents in relation to health, nutrition, and hygiene issues; and contribute to the program's "whole child" approach.
- Consider identifying a weekly period of physical education (PE) instruction within the schedule for each student to clearly demonstrate that the program meets the mandated requirement to provide PE instruction.
- Expand access to technology within classroom settings in an effort to enhance student engagement, participation, and preparation for the technological future. While instructional ratios are limited to 1:2 or 1:3, the use of technology such as access to projectors or whiteboards would be helpful in moving beyond the use of personal devices such as an iPad for small group instruction. The use of such technology provides exposure to technology and opportunities for enhanced instruction. Staff indicated that the use of low-cost/hi-tech devices such as the Echo Dot might result in high yield outcomes for students.

- Consider expanding personnel to include staff that are able to provide mental health/counseling services and standard evaluations although the social emotional needs of students are addressed through the team approach for the provision of services. Possibilities may include a school psychologist, social worker, or guidance counselor based on the needs of the current population. The addition of such support to students, staff, and families would enhance the team approach to addressing the whole child.
- Consider a revision of job descriptions to include minimum and preferred qualifications for each position.
- Maintain the practice/process of careful review of each student's IEP to ensure that the IEPs are accurate, complete, and able to be fully implemented.

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. Please be advised that a recommendation for continuous approval through June 30, 2024, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education once written acceptance of the report in its entirety is received.

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

**Approved Ages:** 15–21 years old

**Approved Capacity:** 45 students

**Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2024

cc: Mike Nicholson, Director of Education