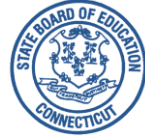




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Kassidy Brown, Chief Administrator
The Lighthouse Vocational-Education Center

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 March 3, 2022, an evaluation team (the team) visited the Lighthouse Vocational-Education Center (Lighthouse Voc-Ed) to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Ms. Dawn Davis, Director of Student Services, Portland Public Schools; and
- Mr. Eric Spencer, Director of Education, Saint Catherine Academy.

During a previous site visit on March 1, 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 March 3, 2022, the team shared its impressions and preliminary findings and 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:

The program serves students ages five to twenty-two with varying disabilities, including intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, Down syndrome, and moderate to severe autism. Many students are non-verbal and all have complex communication and sensory needs. Students

have sensory and movement individualized diets and access a Treadmill for students with Autism and Apraxia Protocol, which uses gross motor movement through a series of walking patterns, to increase social and academic learning opportunities.

The team described the environment as “awesome,” and shared that the “students definitely have what they need here.” The learning environment is a large, open classroom model, which is bright with natural light. The environment also has dim lighting, to accommodate students with visual sensitivity. Each student has an individual sensory area within the open classroom should they become overstimulated.

Staff interviewed provided positive comments regarding administration, specifically, that the education director is deeply involved and knowledgeable in all aspects of the program; is very supportive of teachers; and stated, “administration has a lot of heart and soul.” Also, it was shared that administration encourages autonomy to bring out new ideas and strategies for students.

Students participate in various in-house and community-based weekly activities. In-house activities include music therapy groups, yoga, cooking, themed art and science activities, and morning and afternoon group meetings. Community-based activities include, but are not limited to, visits to Light House Homestead and Stables, community scavenger hunts, walks in the community, shopping at local stores, visits to the beach, swimming lessons, kayaking, and exploring volunteer work sites.

Students benefit from receiving instruction in functional academic life skills (e.g., crossing the street, exchanging money, sharing, and kitchen routines), activities of daily living (e.g., hygiene, dressing, and toileting), soft vocational skills (e.g., operating a dishwasher, sweeping, vacuuming, and emptying garbage), and community exploration (e.g., safety signs, crossing streets, and shopping).

Students participate in community-partner, volunteer work sites, including CVS, Family Pizza, New London Food Pantry, Subway, East Lyme Police Department, Sneekers, Mystic Movie Theater, Garde Arts Center, Light House Homestead and Stables, Niantic Children’s Museum, East Lyme Food Pantry, Mystic Aquarium, New England Science and Sailing, UCONN Avery Point (pool), Ocean Beach (kayaking), Camp Harkness, Scott’s Orchard, Connecticut Science Center, McCook Park, The Book Barn, Groton Bowling, Dairy Queen, Niantic Post Office, Hole in the Wall, Rocky Neck State Park Beach, Stop and Shop, Costco, Walmart, Crystal Mall, and Niantic Boardwalk.

The team described the climate and culture of the program as a harmonious and fostering learning environment. The education director described the environment as very “family like.” Staff demonstrates a strong commitment to the well-being of each student. The team observed an excellent rapport between staff, and staff and students—evident through joking, smile exchanges, and positive comments.

Collaboration and communication were described as a program strength. Daily home-to-school communication is frequent through journals, binders, voice mail, texting, and phone calls. Each student has a binder that goes back and forth—families provide information about the day and/or night. Additionally, teachers communicate with families regularly through email, phone calls, and texts, to share information about the student’s day as well as work with families to help establish routines and carryover of skills learned in the home setting.

To foster student independence, all staff has received training in the Applied Behavioral Analysis Prompt Hierarchy, which shows the path from the most intrusive and least independent form of support, through the least intrusive and most independent form.

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). Teachers utilized differentiated instructional modalities, including visuals, voice prompting, vocalizing and sequencing, hand over hand/hand on hand, and gently turning a student.

Standard Deficiencies:

Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center 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 individualized education program (IEP) and any changes made in that IEP. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student. The IEP presented by the local education agency (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. Each private facility shall request an IEP from the placing LEA prior to student enrollment and at least annually thereafter. 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 1: In four of five IEPs reviewed, the related services were not appropriately, reflected on page eleven—occupational therapy and speech and language services were not clearly identified as being provided individually or within a small group.

Corrective Action: Implement a procedure to utilize prior to finalization 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 to document a process, to ensure that the IEP accurately reflects PPT consensus; and that Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center 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 that:

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 approved private special education program, 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 checks (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 one of five personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a criminal record check was submitted within thirty days of hire for one employee. The criminal record check was submitted but not within the required thirty days of hire.

Corrective Action: On or before, June 30, 2022, submit to the BSE attestation that Lighthouse Vocational Education Center will submit a criminal records check for employees 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 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.

Issue 2: In two of five personnel files reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing completion of a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form prior to employment (employees hired after July 1, 2016).

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

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 the Lighthouse Vocational-Education Center:

Consider hiring a full-time occupational therapist and a full-time speech and language pathologist.

Move forth with the plan to expand upon community partnerships, to increase students' vocational exploration opportunities. A teacher interviewed suggested expanding vocational experiences for students out in the community.

Contact the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Talent Office to make arrangements for the program's education director, to participate in the Teacher Educator And Mentoring (TEAM) District Facilitator training, and teacher mentor training as needed [CSDE TEAM contact information](#).

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

Consider exploring resolutions to staff retention issues. During interviews, staff shared that they would like the program to consider enhancing employee benefits, to include eligibility for paid time off upon employment. It was reported that currently, paid time off is not available until the staff member has been employed six months.

Consider investing in additional technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Continue to explore and consider purchasing a digital device for formal academic and behavioral data collection and additional classroom digital interactive boards. During interviews, staff suggested increasing the use of augmentative communication devices (although students have individual iPads).

Ensure that an annual compilation of the professional development activities in which each staff member participates is well documented and available in each personnel file evidencing that a minimum of eighteen hours of professional development and training has been provided at no cost. Maintain this file in addition to an administrative professional development and training record.

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Provide opportunities for paraeducators to participate in educational trainings with teachers and related service personnel.

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 independence and self-advocacy will assist in preparing students for this transition.

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 the Lighthouse Vocational-Education Center'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 Lighthouse Vocational Education Center:

Approved Ages to Serve: 5 to 22 years old
Approved Grades to Serve: grades K through 12
Approved Student Capacity: 30 students
Approval Expiration Date: June 30, 2027

cc: Julie Longolucco Hill, Education Director