



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Barbara Feldman, Chief Administrator
Woodhouse Academy

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

DATE: November 17, 2022

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

On September 28, 2022, an evaluation team (the team) visited Woodhouse Academy to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/Bureau);
- Kimberly Davis, Director of Student Services, East Lyme Public Schools; and
- Sarah Ulizio, Education Director, Hope Academy.

On September 27, 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 September 28, 2022, the team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The following areas of the special education program were 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
termination of enrollment

Commendations:

The program is designed to recognize the needs of a very specific group of students who may experience a high degree of anxiety and/or depression and/or demonstrate other internalizing behaviors, which have impacted their ability to benefit from a typical school setting.

The school is large, clean, organized, and recently renovated. Classrooms were described as welcoming, engaging, bright with natural light/adequate space with a 1:4 teacher to student ratio.

Staff interviewed indicates that the education director is approachable, extremely supportive, strives to give all a voice, and encourages collaboration.

The program recently hired a second school social worker. In addition to small group services specified in student individualized education programs (IEPs), students and teachers can request additional consultation time with the social workers as needed throughout the day. The social workers also provide support and resources to families.

The program recently hired two special education teachers.

The program's climate and culture is described as positive and reinforcing. The team observed a mutually respectful atmosphere between all individuals involved within the school, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, and visitors. Staff interviewed shared, "it is a very harmonious environment...love working here."

The school provides a safe, structured environment. The Collaborative Problem Solving approach is promoted by the program's overall philosophy—students will do well if they can and if they are not doing well, it is the program's responsibility to collaborate with students to identify the reason(s) and work with the student to overcome them.

The program implements a daily morning meeting upon arrival, which includes all staff and students. Administration, teachers, and related service staff meet each half-day Friday afternoon to discuss students' progress.

The program implements the Understanding By Design approach, which fosters individualization through differentiation, engages students in inquiry, and promotes application to real world situations.

Woodhouse Academy affords teachers and related service providers with opportunities to attend off-site professional development and trainings of individual interest related to their role at no cost.

Standard Deficiencies:

No standard deficiencies were identified.

Recommendations:

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Woodhouse Academy:

Consider providing time for 1:1 teacher collaboration. While program staff frequently engages in collaborative meetings and "in service" on Friday afternoons, teachers shared they would benefit from opportunities to collaborate 1:1. Upon hiring special education teachers, consider a general education and special education teacher co-teaching model.

Provide professional development for general and special education teachers on the topic of co-teaching models and differentiating instructional content, process, and product aligned with individual student interests, readiness levels, and preferential learning modalities.

Move forth with the plan to expand upon the availability of technology through purchasing additional computers to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning.

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Expand opportunities beyond the school community and within the community at large for students to explore their post-secondary goals and interests, as recommended in the previous preliminary report dated June 9, 2022. Develop community connections, which can provide students opportunities to engage in community service activities. Moreover, provide opportunities for those activities that may align with their post-secondary and employment goals identified in their IEP. Staff interviewed expressed the need to re-engage and expand vocational experiences for students out in the community.

Move forth with the plan to expand Woodhouse Academy staff to include a full-time school psychologist. Staff reported that students no longer have access to a school psychologist (due to termination of employment).

Ensure that staff is aware of each student's accommodations as outlined on page 8 of the IEP. If specific strategies or accommodations are no longer appropriate or additional accommodations are needed, recommend to the planning and placement team (PPT) that the IEP should be updated. Provide education staff with training on the topic of modifications and accommodations.

Continue exploring the opportunity for the program to purchase a vehicle and designate staff to obtain required driver endorsements for transporting students into the community. Transporting students to/from school requires drivers to hold a "V" endorsement and to/from activities during the school day requires an "A" endorsement.

Expand upon existing technology to include interactive Smartboards/Promethean Boards to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Staff interviewed expressed the need to do so.

Consider providing opportunities for teachers/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 15 working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether your program agrees with and accepts this preliminary report. Upon receipt of Woodhouse Academy's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the Bureau will submit a recommendation for a five-year program approval through December 1, 2027, to the Commissioner of Education.

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

Approved Ages to Serve:	12 to 22 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	6th through 12th
Approved Capacity:	42 students
Approval Expiration Date:	December 1, 2027

cc: Dr. Stephen Baranski, Education Director