



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Dr. Monica St. Amand-Santos, Chief Administrator  
A Collaborative Academy

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

**DATE:** December 4, 2024

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

On Thursday, October 17, 2024, an evaluation team visited A Collaborative Academy (formerly A Behavioral Approach) to conduct an on-site initial program reapproval review. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE); and
- Julie Hill, Education Director, The Lighthouse Learning Campus.

During a previous site visit on October 15, 2024, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa reviewed the application materials your administration submitted to the BSE.

At the exit conference on October 17, 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:**

The overall climate/culture of A Collaborative Academy is positive, calm, engaging, reinforcing, highly individualized, and respectful. An excellent rapport between education staff and students was observed as evidenced through smile exchanges, humor, and teachers providing students with specific positive praise.

Staff interviewed indicated that the administration is extremely supportive, strives to give all a voice, and encourages collaboration.

The staff engages in ongoing analysis of various data collections, which assists in developing and monitoring students' academic skill development as well as their social emotional growth. The program utilizes the Catalyst electronic data collection and management system. Catalyst allows applied behavior analysis staff to gather academic and behavioral data using iPads, to later access those data for analysis and reporting.

Students benefit from a variety of extracurricular activities in which families are invited. These activities include, but are not limited to, trunk-or-treat, Thanksgiving potluck, holiday party, spirit weeks, monthly themes, and student highlight presentations. The program provides YMCA membership for high school students to earn physical education credits.

Students have access to a variety of vocational training activities in school and in the community. The program has community-based partnerships with CVS, Balleks Garden Center, Walgreens, Old Lyme Veterinary Hospital, Clinton Sports, Action Sports, Soup Kitchen-Westbrook, Old Lyme Hardware Store, Arboretum-New London, and Book Barn.

The program environment was described as clean and organized with a combination of small and large classrooms—bright with natural light. The small class sizes (maximum 5 students) promote student engagement and individualized academic support. Overall, the school provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff are committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student as evidenced by high engagement. Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. Implementation of individualized education program (IEP) academic and behavioral goals was evidenced during classroom observations.

Teachers interviewed reported family communication and engagement as a program strength. Instructional staff communicate with families daily through home/school communication logs, phone calls, and email. Families are integrally involved in the development of students' IEP goals and objectives. The program's board-certified behavior analysts provide families with in-home support. Parent trainings are held via Zoom and in person and focused on individual student needs.

The program has a strong culture of collaboration with a student-centered multidisciplinary team approach providing students with academic and behavioral support. Teachers meet weekly to engage in "kid talks." The program maintains strong communication and collaboration with local education agencies (LEAs) and service providers (contracted occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, and social workers). The contracted service providers shared that they feel they are an integral part of the school team.

**Standard Deficiencies:**

A Collaborative Academy must rectify the following standard deficiencies.

**Standard A: Governance** - A private facility shall have a clearly identifiable governing body that includes a variety of stakeholders who are responsible for the policies and activities of the school. The governing body shall:

- ensure that the facility is in compliance with all relevant federal and state laws and regulations, and local requirements;
- be responsible for ensuring the facility's continual compliance with its charter, constitution, or other organizational documents or agreement;
- appoint a person to act as chief administrator of the special education program and delegate sufficient authority to this person to effectively manage the affairs of the program.

The program's education director must be supervised and evaluated by the program's chief administrator or designee. If the education director also serves as the chief administrator, he/she/they must be supervised and evaluated by the program's governing body. Evaluation procedures for all administrators shall be aligned with the current Connecticut Educator Evaluation System.

**Issue:** The program's chief administrator also serves as the program's education director. The program does not have a clearly identifiable governing body that includes a variety of stakeholders who are responsible for the policies and activities of the school as identified above. Rather, the program's governing body is only comprised of the chief administrator.

**Corrective Action:** On or before December 27, 2024, provide the BSE with an organizational chart and list of governing body members who will be responsible for conducting the performance evaluation of the program's education director.

**Standard E: Individual Student Records** - A private facility shall maintain a written record for each student, which shall include administrative, treatment, and educational data from the time of admission until the time the student leaves the facility. A student's individual record shall contain, but not limited to:

- a record of access (ED628);
- at least two reports per year of student progress toward achieving the objectives in the IEP; and
- data documentation that the progress reports were forwarded appropriately.

**Issue:** In five (5) of five (5) student files reviewed, there was no evidence of a cumulative Record of Access (ED628).

**Corrective Action:** On or before December 27, 2024, submit to the BSE an index or organizational format that will be consistently used for student files to ensure that all required components are contained in each student's education record. In addition, the format must allow easy access and reference for administrators, teachers, related service personnel, LEAs, parents, and others who may need access, to gain insight of the students served and ensure implementation of a student's individual program with fidelity.

On or before December 27, 2024, submit to the BSE copies of a Record of Access for each student currently enrolled. [Confidential File Access Record - ED628](#).

**Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel** - The private facility shall maintain a permanent individual personnel file for each employee and ensure that said file is held confidentially. A private facility shall have a written plan(s) for ongoing personnel development (PD), including a PD policy. Such policy shall include:

- a provision of a minimum of 18 hours of PD to staff each year at no cost;
- PD opportunities which are aligned to individual educator evaluation in areas of identified need; and
- the proper documentation of PD activities.

**Issue 1:** In five (5) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a minimum of 18 hours of PD was provided for staff at no cost.

**Corrective Action:** Maintain a written plan for ongoing personnel PD that must contain: 1) the program, at no cost, provides a minimum of 18 hours of PD activities per school year (relevant to the services of the program) to its certified staff and paraeducators; and 2) documents each PD activity an agenda for the activity, the name and qualifications of the activity presenter(s), and the sign-in/sign-out lists of in-person activity participants and virtual participants, if applicable. Include the full listing of PD activities via a transcript in each staff members personnel file, which reflects all PD activities provided by the program and/or engaged in by staff.

On or before December 27, 2024, provide the BSE with individual personnel PD transcripts for each certified/licensed and paraeducator staff member for the 2024–25 school year to date. Additionally, at academic year end, provide the BSE with the full 2024–25 school year personnel PD transcripts.

**Issue 2:** In one (1) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form was completed by an employee hired after July 1, 2016, in accordance with Public Act 16-67.

**Corrective Action:** On or before December 27, 2024, provide the BSE with an attestation that the *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form will be obtained for each potential new employee hire who will interact directly with students and that upon obtaining completed forms, appropriate contacts will be made with previous or current employers and respondent comments will be document and retained in the respective employee file.

On or before December 27, 2024, provide the BSE with the (dated) *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for the employee of which no evidence was provided during the approval review.

Submit to the BSE the (dated) *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for each new hire who will interact directly with students for the remainder of the 2024-25 academic year and for each school year following through the program's approval expiration date of December 27, 2027.

**Training, Professional Development, and Other Requirements:**

Include “at least one paraeducator” in the program’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee in accordance with Connecticut Public Act 23-159.

Consider expanding opportunities for PD outside resources. Explore the menu of activities and events available through the Connecticut State Education Resource Center for teachers, paraeducators, and related service personnel. Staff shares an appreciation for diverse PD and training opportunities.

Ensure that paraeducators are provided with a minimum of eighteen hours PD per year at no cost in accordance with Connecticut Public Act 23-159.

**Recommendations to Consider:**

Move forth with the plan to purchase additional interactive SMART Boards to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Currently, there is only a SMART Board in one classroom.

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.

Continue to build upon community-based partnerships to foster opportunities for students with IEP transition goals and objectives. Explore career exploration program(s) that enable students to gain insight into potential careers of interest.

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 A Collaborative Academy’s written agreement of adherence to the corrective actions and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for the program’s approval through December 27, 2027, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to A Collaborative Academy.

<b>Approved Ages Served:</b>	3–22 years old
<b>Approved Grades Served:</b>	PreK through 12th
<b>Approved Enrollment Capacity:</b>	20 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	December 27, 2027