



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Dr. Dale Hoyt, Chief Administrator
Ädelbrook Academy of Manchester

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

DATE: June 24, 2024

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

On Thursday, October 26, 2023, an evaluation team visited Ädelbrook Academy of Manchester (Ädelbrook-Manchester) to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/the Bureau);
- Jennifer Johnson, Education Director, High Road Schools of Connecticut; and
- Meghan Osowiecki, Director of Special Education and Related Services, Stamford Public Schools.

During a previous site visit on October 24, 2023, 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 26, 2023, 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:

Staff interviewed reported the program's leadership, specifically the education director, is highly supportive, collaborative, strongly committed to the program, clearly connected to staff and students, knowledgeable, involved in all aspects of the program, and is effective in bringing about team building among staff. Interviewees shared that the program staff "feel like a family and are all happy to be here."

The program has established a positive culture and climate evidenced by positive respectful relationships among students and between staff and students. The school climate was described as lovely, friendly, welcoming, and very accommodating with a family-like atmosphere.

The school facility is well maintained and designed to provide a positive learning environment for students. The main classroom was described as large, bright with open space, and had an abundance of student work and art products displayed.

Staff share an appreciation of the need for collaboration and teamwork. The program has a strong culture of collaboration with a student-centered multidisciplinary team approach providing students with academic and behavioral support. The individualized education program (IEP) development and progress monitoring process is highly collaborative with related service providers integrally involved.

The evaluation team reported evidence of well-planned differentiated instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. Teachers utilized multisensory instructional materials.

All program interviewees cited professional development and training as a program strength, including diverse, educationally related topics, as well as many focused on staff team building and wellness.

Family engagement is a program strength. The program provides an abundance of family engagement opportunities, including an open house, a Thanksgiving Feast, a Santa Claus visit, step-up promotions and graduations for students, barbeques, and talent shows. The program provides training opportunities for parents. Parents, guardians, and community providers are invited to the program's monthly Parent Community Partnership Presentation regarding special education topics. This monthly presentation is often led by the program's related service providers. "Overall, the program has an open-door policy for parents, guardians, and families."

The staff engages in ongoing analysis of various data collections, which assist in developing and monitoring students' academic skill development as well as their social emotional growth.

The program has invested in technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Classrooms are equipped with interactive Smart Boards with projectors, iPads, augmentative and alternative communication devices, and a Chrome Book in each classroom.

Standard Deficiencies:

Adelbrook-Manchester must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

Standard G: Evaluation of Student Progress and Reporting Responsibilities - The private special education program shall submit reports of each child's progress, based on the goals and objectives of the student's IEP, to the responsible local education agency (LEA)/sending agency and to the parents/guardians in accordance with the reporting schedule and content requirements of the child's IEP as determined by the PPT. These reports must be communicated in a language that is easily understood by the parents/guardians.

Issue: In four (4) of five (5) student files reviewed, there was no evidence that progress reports were sent to the responsible LEA/sending agency and to the parents/guardians.

Corrective Action: On or before June 30, 2024, submit to the BSE attestation that progress reports will be submitted to the responsible LEA/sending agency and parents/guardians in accordance with the reporting schedule and content requirements of the child's IEP as determined by the PPT.

Provide evidence to the BSE that Ädelbrook-Manchester submitted progress reports to the placing local education agencies and parents/guardians, or surrogate parent, if appointed, for all students enrolled during the 2023-24 academic year in accordance with Standard G of the *Principles, Procedures and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*.

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 shall ensure said file is confidentially held. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants who will work directly with students before hire. Furthermore, applicants who will work directly with students shall submit to a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Abuse and Neglect Registry record check before hire. The private facility shall obtain the information listed on the *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form from ALL the employee's current or former employer(s) 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. In addition, a state and national criminal history records check (fingerprinting) must be submitted for staff who work directly with students, within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment. Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Section 10-221d.

Issue 1: In two (2) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, a criminal records check was submitted but not timely as required within 30 days of hire.

Issue 2: In one (1) of five (5) reviewed, a fingerprinting check was submitted but not timely as required within 30 days of hire.

Issue 3: In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, a DCF background check was submitted but not timely before hire.

Issue 4: In one (1) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form was not completed before hire for an employee hired after July 1, 2016.

Corrective Action: On or before June 30, 2024, provide the BSE with attestation that a state and national criminal record and fingerprinting check will be submitted within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment, and DCF background checks will be submitted prior to hire in accordance with CGS Section 10-221; and a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form will be completed in accordance with CGS Section 10-221d.

Upon hire of the next five (5) employees, provide the BSE with evidence that the program has submitted a state and national criminal record, and fingerprinting, within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-221d. In addition, provide the BSE with evidence that a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form was completed in accordance with Section 10-221d.

Develop and implement a process for maintaining the necessary documentation within the staff file that includes verification that a state and national criminal record and fingerprinting checks were completed.

On or before June 30, 2024, submit to the BSE a checklist for use (which includes all required and recommended items) to ensure appropriate documentation and verification within each personnel file and consistency across personnel files.

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 (3) months. The special education program, at least monthly, conducts emergency/crisis drills at each program location while school is in session and include actual evacuation of students to safe areas to:

Preliminary Evaluation Report: Ädelbrook Academy of Manchester
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program
June 24, 2024

- ensure that each staff member on each shift is trained to perform assigned tasks;
- assure that each staff member on each shift is familiar with the use of the firefighting equipment in each location of the special education program to which the staff member is assigned;
- evaluate the effectiveness of emergency plans and procedures; and
- ensure the program maintains a signed record of each emergency drill.

Issue: In reviewing emergency drill records, there was no evidence that the program conducted monthly emergency drills that included one crisis response drill, other than a fire drill, once every three (3) months.

Corrective Action: On or before June 30, 2024, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will maintain emergency drill records evidencing it is conducting monthly emergency drills that include one crisis response drill, other than a fire drill, once every three months.

On or before June 30, 2024, submit to the BSE emergency drill records for the full 2023-24 academic year.

On or before June 30, 2025, submit to the BSE emergency drill records for the full 2024-25 academic year.

Recommendations:

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Ädelbrook-Manchester:

Continue efforts to hire additional special education teachers.

Move forth with the plan to expand the playground area to include additional swings, a basketball area, and additional space for “trikes” and field activities.

Continue to consider the expansion of the existing kitchen to enable students to engage in culinary activities.

Provide training/collaboration specific to reviewing student behavior intervention plans and opportunities for “behavior application training.” A teacher interviewed expressed the need for professional development and training, as well as opportunities to collaborate with other teachers focused on behavior intervention plans.

Ensure the program’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) includes at least one teacher, one administrator, and one paraeducator in accordance with CGS 10-220a. Provide an annual program of professional development of at least eighteen (18) hours to paraeducators at no cost in accordance with statutory requirements (Public Act 23-159 Section 10 - Revisions and New Requirements). The professional development may not include trainings otherwise mandated by law, such as trainings regarding DCF policies and procedures, sexual harassment, and bloodborne pathogens.

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 planning placement team (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 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 professional development and training opportunities.

Preliminary Evaluation Report: Ädelbrook Academy of Manchester
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program
June 24, 2024

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 Ädelbrook Academy of Manchester’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 is applicable to Ädelbrook Academy Manchester:

- Approved Ages to Serve:** 3–11 years old
- Approved Grades to Serve:** Pre-K through 6th
- Approved Enrollment Capacity:** 36 students
- Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2027

cc: Cathy Danielczuk, Education Director