




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Kathryn DuPree, Chief Administrator
Benhaven School

FROM: Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator 
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: February 4, 2020

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

On Tuesday, January 14, 2020, an evaluation team visited the Benhaven School special education program to conduct an on-site review for continuous approval. The evaluation team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Linda Zunda, Education Director, Elizabeth Ives School for Special Children; and
- Aimee Turner, Director of Pupil Services, Wallingford Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on January 7, 2020, Colleen Hayles reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. Ms. Hayles has also reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Benhaven School administration.

At the exit conference on January 14, 2020, 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:

- The program focuses on teaching and serving the needs of students who have previously not met with school success. Student programs are highly individualized, designed to allow students to meet with success, and provided year round.

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- Staff values the support of the program's education director and her ability to recognize all the staff's strengths. Professional development (PD) is provided to all staff. Care is always taken to match student needs with staff strengths and the relationship between student and staff member is also considered.
- PD activities are relevant and targeted to support staff in addressing the needs of the students served. The administration highly supports PD opportunities and staff is able to easily, access resources.
- The program supports a true team approach that includes parents' input and unique goals for their child, which are born from individual family values.
- Staff values the collaborative climate across all aspects of the school.
- The program provides topic specific parent education/training in the evening. These education/training opportunities have included topics such as transition and the impact of brain injury.
- The program focuses on providing experiences within the community for all students and demonstrates a strong commitment to giving back to the community through a variety of activities.
- While many students' individualized education programs (IEPs) call for individualized support (i.e., 1:1) at enrollment, a "fade plan" is developed upon admission to enhance each student's level of independence.
- Vocational experiences and instruction are highly individualized and carefully developed based on student strengths and areas of interest.
- Futures Planning is initiated with all students and focuses on positive/possible goals that encourage students, staff, and families to "reach for the stars with feet on the ground."
- Each classroom has an assigned vehicle and driver, which promotes the availability of community experiences for all students and allows teaching staff to focus on the needs of their students when accessing the community.

- Great effort is made to provide each student with a predictable transition when entering or exiting the program. Students visiting the program often have access to a video presentation of their new routine and benefit from their prospective teacher visiting them within their current, familiar setting.
- The program has a unique and effective approach to supporting student behavior through the individualized behavioral support plan. Functional behavior assessments are conducted and continually revised in order to drive the response to targeted behaviors that are clearly, defined and categorized (i.e., agitation, destruction, and aggression). De-escalation strategies are individualized and clearly articulated. Positive interventions are developed to include ecological manipulations, antecedent manipulation, response and skill manipulation, and consequence manipulation. Notation of current medications is also included. The final aspect of the plan includes guidelines on how to “debrief” with the student following a critical incident or potential stressful situation. The plan also documents dates of review and any changes initiated.
- The program’s medical advisor is highly involved in reviewing referrals for enrollment, supporting staff, addressing student needs, and as a resource to both staff and families.
- Classroom observations illustrated the varied individualized use of augmented communication devices and methods.
- The facility provides a wide array of equipment and materials to address the unique and varied needs of the students served.
- Related services are provided via individual/pull-out instruction and push-in/small group instruction. Related service personnel are an integral part of the team and work with teachers and paraprofessionals within one-to-one settings, classroom settings, as well as within the community.
- Staff view paraprofessional supervision as intense and allows growth and promotion within the system.

Standard Deficiencies:

There are no identified standard deficiencies at this time.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered to Benhaven School:

- Consider the addition of a part-time social worker to focus on addressing family needs.

- Enhance communication between members of the classroom staff when a student moves to a different classroom within the program.
- Consider expanding on-grounds, outdoor recreational opportunities (i.e., outdoor track).
- Continue to expand available technology, as appropriate.
- Consider facility enhancements such as the addition of a multipurpose room and comfort space, to serve the current student capacity.
- Encourage all local education agencies to document the program as a year-round program versus a school-year program with abbreviated extended school year services (for maintenance), which does not clearly illustrate the students' need for continued year-round educational programming.
- Review IEP's carefully upon referral to ensure that related services are appropriately, delineated as to whether or not instruction is carried out in an individualized setting or within a small group. Request clarification and revision by the planning and placement team (PPT), as appropriate, when the placement PPT occurs.
- Consider utilizing some in-service afternoons to provide time for additional collaboration within individual classroom teams.

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, 2025, 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 Benhaven School:

Approved Ages to Serve:	5 through 21 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	K through 12
Approved Student Capacity:	44 students
Expiration Date of Approval:	June 30, 2025

cc: Karen Helene