



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



December 17, 2024

Courtney Hartzler  
Chief Administrator  
Bloom Transition Program  
1854 Route 12  
Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Dear Chief Administrator Hartzler:

Attached is the preliminary evaluation report for Bloom Transition Program based upon the findings of a Bureau of Special Education (BSE) evaluation team. The report contains commendations; detailed standard deficiencies with required corrective actions and timelines; professional development requirements; and recommendations.

Please indicate in writing whether your program agrees with the report. Send the response to Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant; Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE); Bureau of Special Education-APSEPs; P.O. Box 2219; Hartford, CT 06145-2219 or [dori.papa@ct.gov](mailto:dori.papa@ct.gov). Upon receipt of written acceptance of the report in its entirety, the BSE will submit a 3-year approval recommendation through December 29, 2027, to the Commissioner of Education.

We thank you and your staff for the full support and cooperation extended to the Department's program review team. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Papa by telephone at 860-713-6923 or by e-mail at [dori.papa@ct.gov](mailto:dori.papa@ct.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bryan Klimkiewicz".

Bryan Klimkiewicz  
Special Education Division Director

BK:rgg  
cc: Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, CSDE  
Susan Costa, Education Director



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
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**TO:** Courtney Hartzler, Chief Administrator  
Bloom Transition Program

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

**DATE:** December 17, 2024

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

On Thursday, October 31, 2024, an evaluation team visited the Bloom Transition Program to conduct an on-site program reapproval review. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE); and
- Linda Zunda, Education Director, Elizabeth Ives School for Special Children.

During a previous site visit on October 30, 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 31, 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:**

A teacher interviewed stated, "administration is supportive, encourages team collaboration, and maintains an open-door policy."

The program provides postsecondary related curriculum, community involvement, life skills training, and vocational skill development as practiced on site and at a variety of community-based vocational sites.

The program is centrally located to many community facilities. Community-based partnerships include CVS, Mohegan Sun, local diners, Ledyard Parks and Recreation Department, and volunteer opportunities at various sites.

The program maintains close collaboration with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). BRS and DDS provide on-site informational sessions for students and families and additional personalized meetings as necessary to plan and provide services for the continuation of care/transition as applicable.

The observation team noted communication and collaboration as a program strength. The case manager (teacher) and related service providers (contracted occupational therapist and speech/language pathologist) maintain regular communication with families, students, and placing local education agencies (LEAs). This communication is maintained via preferred method (email and/or phone, as well as home communication logs as necessary for families) so that all multidisciplinary members are informed in progression of skill acquisition, generalization opportunities, and other needs that arise.

The observation team described classrooms as clean, organized with labeled student work bins and boxes, and bright with “open airy space.” The overall climate and culture of the program is positive, collaborative, highly individualized, and focused on skill development, therefore providing students with the tools to promote success as lifelong learners.

An excellent rapport between education staff and students was observed as evidenced through smiles, humor, and teachers providing students with specific positive praise.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Implementation of accommodations and modifications were evidenced for a student with visual impairment as identified in the individualized education program (IEP). Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. Lessons incorporated an academic and a vocational component focused on budgeting and nutrition, and activities of daily living. The observation team also noted that teachers and paraeducators worked “in sync with very effective nonverbal communication.”

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

Bloom Transition Program 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 document or agreement; and
- 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 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. The program’s governing body is only comprised of the chief administrator.

**Corrective Action:** On or before December 29, 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 chief administrator. Provide the BSE with the chief administrator's annual performance evaluation report conducted by the program's governing body for the 2024–25 academic year.

**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 student's individual record that shall contain, as a minimum, the following:

- a copy of the IEP proposed by the LEA prior to referral and at least annually thereafter, indicating current levels of performance, accommodations/modifications; and specialized instruction, supports and services (and, as appropriate, a behavior intervention plan and a language and communication plan) developed by the planning and placement team (PPT) as required to provide a free appropriate public education;
- reports of student progress toward achieving the objectives in the IEP that are aligned with reporting dates as determined by the PPT and as indicated on the student's IEP;
- consent forms signed by the parent(s)/guardian(s) allowing the facility to authorize all prescribed medical treatment, including the consent forms when a private facility conducts routine screenings (i.e., hearing/vision or provides immunizations required by statute to students);
- **cumulative health records;**
- evaluation records; and
- required documentation needed to inform required data collections (i.e., Teacher-Course Student data, membership and attendance data, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, incidents of the emergency use of restraint or seclusion, reports of injury [serious and non-serious] resulting from a restraint or seclusion, and reports of all other significant events that may require a PPT).

**Issue:** In two (2) of five (5) student files reviewed, health records were not current.

**Corrective Action:** On or before December 29, 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.

**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 held confidentially. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants and that applicants submit to a Department of Children and Families 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 the applicant'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, state and national criminal history records check (fingerprinting) of staff who work directly with students, shall be submitted within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment. Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Section 10-221d.

**Issue:** In two (2) 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 29, 2024, provide the BSE with an attestation that the *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form will be obtained for each potential new employee who will have direct interaction with students and that upon obtaining completed forms, appropriate contacts will be made with previous or current employers.

Submit to the BSE the (dated) *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for each new hire who interacts 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 29, 2027.

Additionally, on or before December 29, 2024, provide the BSE with the *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for the employee files reviewed during the approval review with no evidence of the form.

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

Expand the program’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee to include at least one special education teacher and one paraeducator in accordance with Public Act 23-159 [AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHERS AND PARAEDUCATORS](#).

Consider expanding opportunities for outside professional development (PD) resources. Explore the menu of activities and events available for teachers, paraeducators, and related service personnel through the Connecticut State Education Resource Center ([SERC Professional Development Opportunities](#)). Staff shares an appreciation for diverse PD and training opportunities. Ensure that paraeducators are provided with a minimum of 18 hours of PD per year at no cost in accordance with Connecticut Public Act 23-159. [AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHERS AND PARAEDUCATORS](#).

### **Recommendations to Consider:**

Consider investing in technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. The observation team reported that lessons observed did not incorporate technology—only a calculator. Staff interviewed shared students would benefit by equipping classrooms with interactive Smart Boards and individual iPads.

Ensure the chief administrator does not engage in duties/responsibilities of the education director in accordance with Standard I: Qualifications of Administrators, Instructional and Support Personnel of the *Approved Private Special Education Program Principles, Procedures and Standards*. Currently, the program’s education director is only on the physical program site for six (6) hours per week.

Move forth with the plan to relocate the transition program to a larger building/space.

Consider hiring a school social worker and/or transition coordinator. A teacher interviewed shared that although some students receive outside counseling support, students would benefit from more immediate support services during school hours from a school-based social worker and/or a transition coordinator.

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 to a lesser restrictive environment 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.

Preliminary Evaluation Report: Bloom Transition Program  
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program  
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Acquire a larger van to accommodate the number of students needing daily transportation to off-grounds activities. A teacher who transports students to career exploration activities during the school day expressed the need for a larger vehicle.

Move forth with the plan to explore off-site opportunities for students to engage in physical education (PE) activities. The program director expressed the desire to secure a contract with a local gym to maintain a consistent schedule for PE activities.

Expand upon the program's 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) documentation of each PD activity (e.g., agenda, flyer, name/qualifications of the presenter(s), PD content, certificate, and the sign-in/sign-out lists of in-person activity participants/virtual participants). Include in each staff members personnel file, the full listing of PD activities(via a transcript) that reflects all PD activities the program has provided and/or PD activities in which staff has engaged.

Move forth with the plan to build additional community-based partnerships to foster opportunities for students with IEP transition goals and objectives. Find 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 the Bloom Transition Program's written agreement of adherence to corrective actions and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for the program's approval through December 29, 2027, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Bloom Transition Program.

<b>Approved Ages Served:</b>	14 through 22 years old
<b>Approved Grades Served:</b>	9th through 12th
<b>Approved Enrollment Capacity:</b>	10 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	December 29, 2027

cc: Susan Costa, Education Director