



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Dr. Kathryn O'Connor, Chief Administrator  
Connecticut College Child Development Lab School

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

**DATE:** June 14, 2023

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

On April 13, 2023, an evaluation team visited Connecticut College Child Development Lab School (CCCDLS) to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/the Bureau);
- Mr. Mark Hedrick, Senior Education Director, Oak Hill School; and
- Mr. Scott Trepanier, Director of Special Education/Early Childhood, Lisbon Public Schools.

During a previous site visit on April 11, 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 April 13, 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:**

The CCCDLS is a child and family-focused early childhood preschool program for children with diverse abilities. The program provides a laboratory setting for college student placements and student and faculty research opportunities. CCCDLS provides an excellent inclusive setting to address the needs of young children eligible for special education services within a play-based program. Children with learning disabilities learn alongside their neurotypical peers.

Staff shared that leadership is very supportive, available and responsive to staff needs throughout the day, and ensures that all needed resources are provided in a timely manner. Overall, staff reported they are happy with the communication between them and administration and administration's accessibility.

The overall climate and atmosphere of the school is described as warm, welcoming, accepting, caring, and inclusive. A strong sense of community and team collaboration was noted.

The program staffing includes a team of professionals (education administrators; early childhood and special education teachers; speech, occupational, and physical therapists; and behavior analysts, social workers, and psychologists.

The curriculum is based on the premise that play is how children interact with, and learn from, their environment. The play-based curriculum is implemented by professional teams. These teams include highly qualified teachers who hold dual certifications in early childhood education and special education, as well as, contracted related service personnel, which currently includes a board-certified behavior analyst, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist, and a physical therapist.

The evaluation team reported that the application of the Early Learning and Development Standards and integration of developmentally appropriate activities was evident throughout the program.

The areas of fine and gross motor skills, language and cognitive skills, social/emotional skills, and creative expression are promoted through developmentally appropriate play options such as art, block building, dramatic play, music, movement, story time, and outdoor recreation.

The program values parental partnerships that are viewed as an integral part of the program. Parents are encouraged to share their time and talents with children in their child's classroom and schoolwide. Various activities are offered to engage families, including, but not limited to, a kickoff-the-school-year family picnic, coffee socials throughout the school year, parent trainings (topics determined by parent surveys), family arboretum walks, CCCDLS supported activities such as ice skating and theater opportunities, and yoga for parents with their children. End-of-school year activities include a school gathering at Harkness Park with dinner provided.

Staff shared that collaboration is a program strength. The program has a school community meeting every morning in the meeting hall before school begins that includes all staff and students. Contracted related service professionals shared that their input is highly valued and view themselves as true team members whose experience and expertise is valued and integrated into the total program, benefiting all students enrolled. Therapists work with students within the classroom and model interventions and best practices. Related service providers collaborate with each other and engage in co-treatment when appropriate.

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

Connecticut College Child Development Lab School must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

**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 a copy of the individualized education program (IEP) proposed by the local education agency (LEA) prior to referral and at least annually thereafter. The IEP shall indicate current levels of performance; accommodations; modifications; specialized instruction; supports and services; and as appropriate, a BIP and a language and communication plan developed by the planning and placement team (PPT) as required, to provide a free appropriate public education.

**Standard F: Program Requirements** - The local school district is responsible for the development and appropriateness of a student's IEP and any changes made in that IEP. Each private facility shall request an IEP from the placing LEA prior to student enrollment and at least annually thereafter. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student. The IEP presented by the LEA serves as the basis for admission and should identify the current performance levels of the student, the appropriate specialized instruction, and required related services. Each private facility should participate in the PPT meeting, which discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to student enrollment. For students placed by other agencies, the private facility should obtain an IEP from the district having educational jurisdiction as soon as feasibly possible after placement.

**Issue:** In one (1) of one (1) student file reviewed, there was no evidence of a current IEP for a student enrolled through the LEA PPT.

**Note:** At the time of the program approval visits on April 11 and April 13, 2023, the program only had one (1) Connecticut student placed through the LEA PPT process.

On May 19, 2023, the program submitted a finalized current IEP for the student identified in the above issue.

**Corrective Action (Standards E and F):** Develop and submit to the BSE a program protocol for communicating with LEAs to ensure student records are obtained prior to admission or no later than one (1) week of the student's admission into the program and annually thereafter (including, but not limited to the IEP). Submit to the BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. The copies shall be finalized, demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrate the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes. On or before June 23, 2023, submit to the BSE a copy of the process/procedures developed to review IEPs and how CCCDLS will notify/inform districts.

**Standard H: Positive Behavioral Supports, Prevention, and Intervention Strategies** - Each private facility shall have written policies and procedures describing the positive behavioral supports and services as well as the prevention and intervention strategies employed by the program. Each private facility shall make provisions to train staff in positive behavioral supports and services as well as prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, the program will provide all staff the training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint and seclusion. The program will provide training to an identified crisis intervention team or all staff that meets the requirements of current legislation and/or regulations that addresses the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and includes, but not limited to, verbal defusing or de-escalation, prevention strategies, types of physical restraint, the differences between life-threatening physical restraint and other varying levels of physical restraint, the differences between permissible physical restraint and pain compliance techniques, monitoring to prevent harm to a person physically restrained or in seclusion, and recording and reporting procedures on the use of restraint and seclusion. The facility should ensure that staff executes such techniques with fidelity and due regard for fairness, humanity, and the dignity of the individual. Only those staff members trained in accordance with current statutes can engage in the emergency use of restraint or seclusion.

**Issue:** CCCDLS did not provide ten (10) education staff who interact directly with students with the required annual training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion.

**Corrective Action:** Although no restraint and seclusion incidents occurred during the 2021-22 or 2022-23 school years, the Connecticut State Department of Education is requiring CCCDLS to provide staff with training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint/seclusion. On or before June 23, 2023, provide the BSE with a letter of attestation that CCCDLS will annually provide its staff with training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint/seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of

restraint/seclusion. Provide the BSE with documentation evidencing the ten (10) education staff members (name, date, and duration of topic; and certificate of completion) received the required training(s). Additionally, provide the BSE with documentation annually (prior to CCCDLS's first day of school) evidencing that all staff have received the required annual training during the previous year and include the name, title/position, and training date(s).

**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 in confidence. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants. In addition, the private facility shall ensure the applicants submit to a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Abuse and Neglect Registry records check before hiring staff who will work directly with students. 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. CGS Section 10-22d.

**Issue(s):**

- In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence of pre-employment work references for individuals who interact directly with students and no evidence the references were requested or received.
- In one (1) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a criminal records check was submitted within 30 days of hire. The criminal checks were conducted, however, not within 30 days of hire.
- In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a fingerprinting check was submitted within 30 days of hire. The fingerprinting checks were conducted, however, not within 30 days of hire.
- In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a DCF background check was conducted within 30 days of hire. The DCF background checks were submitted, however, not within 30 days of hire.
- In two (2) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification form was completed in accordance with Connecticut Public Act 16-67.

**Corrective Action:** On or before June 23, 2023, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will document submission date requests of criminal, fingerprinting, and DCF background checks in individual personnel files to evidence submission requests were within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-22d.

**Recommendations:**

The BSE offers the following recommendations to CCCDLS:

Explore opportunities to improve information technology support and connectivity availability through Connecticut College or the implementation of an independent carrier to support internet accessibility within the school program. Staff reported the Wi-Fi accessibility is "spotty" and the printer does not consistently work.

Ensure that the school administrators and all other appropriate education staff participate in CT-SEDS and IEP Quality Trainings particularly those designed specifically for the approved private special education programs. Teacher interviewees said they want to learn about CT-SEDS and the new IEP and would like to be more involved in the IEP development process.

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Maintain a list of professional development and training activities in each professional staff personnel file that identifies the date, topic, duration, and cumulative training hours evidencing CCCDLS provides a minimum of 18 hours of professional development annually funded by the program.

Develop a Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) to participate collaboratively in designing a comprehensive plan that clearly describes how to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate professional learning within the program. An effective PDEC is composed of certified teachers, administrators, and other appropriate school personnel. Consider including paraeducator participation on the PDEC and in staff trainings with teachers. Develop and circulate an interest survey inventory to all education staff to solicit specific interests in professional development topics.

Maintain close communication, decision-making, and planning practices among administrators. Interviewees reported that at times they “receive mixed messages from the different administrators.” Staff expressed they would appreciate it if scheduled meeting times were kept “sacred” as they are sometimes cancelled or moved to a different location with minimal notice.

Move forth with the plan to refill the “parent coordinator” position.

Move forth with the plan to hire a “teacher assistant” (paraeducator) to assist the classroom teachers with implementing behavioral interventions and data collection.

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 Connecticut College Child Development Lab School’s written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the Bureau will submit a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2028, to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Connecticut College Child Development Lab School:

<b>Approved Ages to Serve:</b>	2.5 through 7 years old
<b>Approved Grades to Serve:</b>	PreK
<b>Approved Enrollment Capacity:</b>	17 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2028