



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Ms. Angela Foley Powers  
Connecticut Education Center

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

**DATE:** June 15, 2022

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

On September April 7, 2022, an evaluation team (the team) visited Connecticut Education Center (CEC) an on-site initial program review. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler, Director of Special Education and Student Supports, Greenwich Public Schools; and
- Maeghen Plourde, Director of Educational Services, The Fresh Start School Focus Center for Autism.

During a previous site visit on April 5, 2022, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration.

At the exit conference on April 7, 2022, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings and reviewed the following areas of the special education program:

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  
termination of enrollment

**Commendations:**

A description of the overall climate and culture of CEC was as positive and reinforcing, supportive, and engaging.

During interviews, teachers and related service providers reported that administration is very supportive of the entire educational team. They reported that administration is accessible, welcomes and values staff input, and is integrally involved in the academic and behavioral programming of students—integrally involved in all aspects of the program.

Staff shares an appreciation of the need for collaboration and teamwork. The program has a strong collaboration culture with a student-centered team approach providing students with academic, behavioral, and therapeutic support. Collaboration is part of the structural day with rotating morning and afternoon meetings. Individualized education program (IEP) development is a highly collaborative multidisciplinary team process.

Clinical case managers conduct weekly social skills groups utilizing the Second Step curriculum. CEC conducts groups early in the week to allow carry-over on specific skill areas, which occur during morning meetings throughout the week. The program provides Individual social skill sessions, which address specific skill area focus through modeling and role-playing.

Students' academic and behavioral programming are data driven. Academic progress monitoring tools include STAR Reading and STAR Math. CEC collects behavioral data on all students to monitor/track individualized goals tailored to their social/emotional needs.

The program's goal is to "stabilize student and transition them back into their least restrictive environment, which is often the student's public-school setting." Program teachers and the board-certified behavioral analyst visit the student's home school to assist in the development of a re-entry plan that ensures a smooth and successful transition.

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

Connecticut Education Center must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

**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. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student. The IEP presented by the local education agency (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 planning and placement team (PPT) meeting, which discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to student enrollment. Each private facility shall request from the placing LEA an IEP prior to enrollment of the student in the private facility and at least annually thereafter. For students placed by other agencies, the private facility should obtain an IEP after placement as soon as feasible from the district having educational jurisdiction.

**Issue:** In one of five IEPs reviewed, the related services identified on page eleven of the IEP were not appropriately reflected—counseling services were not clearly identified as provided individually or within a small group.

**Corrective Action:** Implement a procedure prior to finalization of an IEP after participating in a PPT meeting. Said procedure shall ensure that all the information in the IEP is complete and accurate; allows the ability to document a process, ensuring the IEP accurately reflects PPT

consensus; and CEC can implement the supports and services outlined in the document as written (i.e., require clarification of all related service whether is provided individually or within a group setting).

Submit to the BSE copies of the next three IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. The copies shall demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness. Illustrate written notification to the district, to request necessary changes.

**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 said file is confidential. The private facility shall require that prior work references are on record for all applicants and that the applicant submit to a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Abuse and Neglect Registry record 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 current or former employer(s) of the applicant if such employer was a local or regional board of education, an approved private special education program (APSEP), 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 thirty days of hire and on file within sixty days from the date of employment. Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Section 10-221d.

**Issue 1:** In four of five personnel files reviewed, a criminal records check was not timely, submitted as required within thirty days of hire. Criminal record checks for the four employees were submitted but not within the required thirty days of hire.

**Issue 2:** In four of five personnel files reviewed, a fingerprinting check was not timely, submitted as required within thirty days of hire. Fingerprinting checks for the four employees were submitted but not within the required thirty days of hire.

**Issue 3:** In five of five personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that DCF background checks were timely, submitted as required within thirty days of hire. DCF background checks for the five employees were submitted but not within the required thirty days of hire.

**Corrective Action:** On or before July 1, 2022, provide the BSE with attestation that a state and national criminal record, fingerprinting check, and DCF background check will be submitted within thirty days of hire and on file within sixty days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-221d.

Develop and index or organizational format to consistently, use for personnel files. Said format is to ensure that all required components are contained in each file, including, but not limited to, pre-employment work references, criminal records check, fingerprinting check, DCF background check, annual performance evaluations, and a *State of Connecticut Educational Employment Verification* form for personnel hired after July 1, 2016, in accordance with Public Act 16-67.

**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 months.



**Issue(s):** In reviewing emergency drill records, there was no evidence that CEC conducted fire drills monthly and no evidence that every third drill was a crisis drill.

**Corrective Action:** On or before July 1, 2022, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will maintain emergency drill documentation evidencing that it conducted fire drills monthly and every third drill will be a crisis drill.

**Recommendations:**

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Connecticut Education Center:

Ensure to retain progress reports in each student's education file and forward to parents/guardians, the sending LEA, and education surrogates as applicable.

Move forth with the plan to hire additional special education teachers.

Develop and index or organizational format to consistently, use for student education files to ensure all required documents for each student enrolled are contained within. Refer to Section R, Student Files (page 33, item 99b) of the *Application for Approval of a Private Special Education Program*.

Continue to invest and expand the availability of technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. Consider maximizing the use of existing technology through additional staff training to enhance use for instruction. Ensure to include all accommodations and assistive technology devices, as appropriate, in the IEP when reviewing IEPs developed by the district PPT after the initial enrollment of the student.

Contact the CSDE Talent Office to arrange for the program's education director to participate in the Teacher Educator And Mentoring (TEAM) District Facilitator training and for teacher mentor training as needed.

Contact the CSDE Talent Office to arrange for the program's chief administrator to participate in the SEED Evaluation training in preparation for conducting the Education Director's performance evaluations.

Consider increasing time for 1:1 teacher collaboration. Those interviewed expressed appreciation for team meetings, but they would like more opportunities to meet on a one-to-one basis.

Consider purchasing sensory equipment to provide occupational therapy services. As reported, the program does not currently have any occupational therapy equipment.

Consider exploring and implementing a systematic reading program with a scope and sequence. Even though, the program is engaging a teacher in Orton Gillingham training focused on the foundation and understanding of how students learn to read.

Increase communication and collaboration with parents/guardians. The team suggested that the program implement a communication system through providing school-to-home daily communication sheets/notebooks, to share both positive comments and concerns.

Continue to expand the vocational education program. Move forth with the plan to develop community partnerships and provide job coaching to foster opportunities for students with IEP transition goals and objectives. Explore and purchase an online career exploration program.

Continue to evaluate the efficacy of the school-wide behavior intervention system, and if needed, make system revisions to increase student success. Consider posting the principles of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) visuals and routines throughout the school. Interviewees expressed the need for school-wide training in PBIS.

Provide opportunities for paraeducators to participate in educational trainings with teachers and related service personnel.

Develop a Professional Development Evaluation Committee (PDEC). An effective PDEC is composed of certified teachers, administrators and other appropriate school personnel. Expand upon the member diversity of the committee. Circulate a survey to education and related service personnel to solicit professional development and training topics of interest specific to their discipline. Align professional development and training topics to teacher and related service personnel SEED evaluation results identifying areas of continued growth.

Maintain a written record for each student. The record shall include administrative, treatment, and educational data from the time of "consideration for admission" until the time the student leaves the facility. Said record shall include, but not be limited to, cumulative health records in accordance with Section E, Individual Student Records of the *Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*. Develop an index or organizational format to consistently, use for student education files to ensure all required documents for each enrolled student are contained within. Refer to Section R, Student Files (page 33, item 99b) of the *Application for Approval of a Private Special Education Program*.

Request an IEP from the placing LEA prior to student enrollment and at least annually thereafter in accordance with Section F, Program Requirements of the *Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*.

Ensure an annual professional development compilation of activities in which each staff member participates is well documented and available in each personnel file. Each personnel file shall evidence CEC has provided a minimum of eighteen hours of professional development and training at no cost. Maintain this file in addition to the existing administrative professional development and training record.

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.

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: Connecticut Education Center  
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Within fifteen 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 Connecticut Education Center's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the BSE will submit a one-year initial approval through July 1, 2023, to the Commissioner of Education.

Following the one-year initial approval, representatives from the CSBE or its designee shall review the approval status of Connecticut Education Center to ensure the facility's continual compliance with the implementation of APSEP standards. Thereafter, a review shall take place as needed but no longer than once every three to five years.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Connecticut Education Center:

**Approved Ages to Serve:** 5 through 15 years old

**Approved Grades to Serve:** grades K through 8

**Approved Capacity:** 20 students

**Approval Expiration Date:** July 1, 2023

cc: Sandra Donah, Education Director