



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Amy Samela, Chief Administrator
Eagle House Education Program

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 May 11, 2023, an evaluation team visited Eagle House Education Program (Eagle House) to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/the Bureau);
- Ms. Samantha Cook, Chief Administrator/Education Director, Westport Day School; and
- Ms. Katherine Matz, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, New Fairfield Public Schools.

During a previous site visit on May 9, 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 May 11, 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:

Eagle House is a specialized school program for children who are participating in the Eagle House Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility. The focus is on trauma-informed practices as well as positive behavior supports throughout the school day to strengthen academic skills in addition to addressing social/emotional and behavioral needs.

Enrollment is short term and focuses on building relationships with students to stabilize them, help them improve overall functioning, and build the skills necessary to transition into a more permanent educational environment and family situation.

The evaluation team characterized the education and related service personnel as “upbeat and positive.” Teachers and related service providers shared they “love working here.” Positive respectful relationships among students and between staff and students are evident.

The evaluation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction aligned with Connecticut Core Standards, which appeared to be appropriate given the current level of performance for each student.

A level system that focuses on developing appropriate social and school behaviors is implemented and coordinated across the school and residential setting.

Standard Deficiencies:

Eagle House Education Program must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

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.

Issue: In reviewing emergency drill records, Eagle House documented fire drills as occurring monthly. However, there was no evidence that every third drill was a crisis drill.

Corrective Action: On or before June 23, 2023, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will maintain emergency drill documentation evidencing that every third drill will be a crisis drill.

Recommendations:

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Eagle House Education Program:

Maintain a list of all professional development (PD) and training activities in each personnel file that identifies the date, topic, duration, and cumulative training hours evidencing Eagle House provided a minimum of 18 hours of PD annually funded by the program.

Allow opportunities for collaboration between teachers and clinical staff. While it was reported that there is close communication between the program education director and clinical/residential administration and staff, teachers interviewed expressed that they would like opportunities for collaboration particularly with the direct care staff. It was also shared that “there is no communication between teachers and clinicians because all communication must go through the school social worker.” Additionally, a staff member reported that the organizational structure “is a challenge” because paraeducators do not report to the school principal.

Consider relocating the existing “cool down space,” which is currently located in close proximity to the school’s front entry door, to protect the privacy and dignity of students. All interviewees expressed the need for a more private “cool down space.”

Implement having the education director provide greater supervision, support, and feedback to professional staff regarding their performance evaluations. A related service provider interviewee expressed a need for “greater supervision, support, and feedback to grow in their professional practice.”

Develop a program protocol for communicating with local education agencies (LEAs) to ensure student records, including, but not limited to, the individualized education program (IEP) is obtained prior to admission or no later than one (1) week of the student’s enrollment into the program. Communicate with LEAs to request a planning and placement team (PPT) meeting thirty (30) days following admission to review student’s current levels of academic and behavioral performance and revise the IEP as deemed appropriate by the PPT.

Continue to explore the possibility of implementing the “The Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions (RULER)” system to address the social and emotional learning needs of students aimed at infusing the principles of emotional intelligence.

Consider adding a paraeducator on the school’s Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC). In accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance, an effective PDEC committee is composed of, but not limited to, certified teachers, administrators, and other appropriate school personnel to define a shared vision and establish collective responsibility for the development, evaluation, and update of a comprehensive professional learning plan. Include paraeducators’ in educational and special education PD activities in preparation for participation in PPT meetings, in accordance with Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) paraeducators are required to attend PPT meetings upon parental request.

Explore additional opportunities for teachers to benefit from collaboration with educators outside the agency, to ensure they remain current in the implementation of the Connecticut Core Standards and other best practices. Allow observation of general education or special education settings to which students might transition, doing so will promote development of realistic and targeted goals for students enrolled.

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.

Allow opportunities for educational-based PD topics. Interviewees shared that while they participate in numerous residentially required and mandated trainings, they would value opportunities for educational-based PD topics.

Continue efforts to hire additional special education teachers. Explore and implement recruitment and retention strategies to maintain qualified staff through activities such as outreach to college teacher preparation programs, the provision of additional incentives, and a review of salaries and benefits.

Preliminary Evaluation Report: Eagle House Education Program
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program
June 14, 2023

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 Eagle House Education Program's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2028, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Eagle House Education Program:

Approved Ages to Serve:	6 through 13 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	1st through 8th
Approved Enrollment Capacity:	28 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2028

cc: Dr. Tina Parchin, Education Director