




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Linda Zunda, Chief Administrator
Elizabeth Ives School for Special Children, Inc.

FROM: Dori Papa, Ed. D., Education Consultant 
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: December 14, 2020

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

Please note: This Approved Private Special Education Program approval review was conducted remotely due to the current public health and safety requirements resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. All required activities and components, as defined in the *Policies, Procedures and Standards for Approved Private Special Education Programs*, were conducted remotely and in accordance with the approval process.

On October 28, 2020, an evaluation team conducted a site visit review for re-approval of the Elizabeth Ives School for Special Children, Inc. (Elizabeth Ives) special education program. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Beth Giller, Director of Pupil and Staff Support Services, Coventry Public Schools; and
- Katie Cyr, Education Director, Aspire Living and Learning Academy.

During a previous virtual site visit on October 19, 2020, Dr. Papa of the BSE reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration.

At the exit conference on October 28, 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.

1. Commendations:

- Teacher and related service provider interview respondents reported that the administrator maintains an open-door policy, an “open ear,” is very supportive, and creates a positive environment overall.
- A positive culture and climate has been established and is evidenced by mutually respectful relationships among students and between staff and students.
- The program provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff are committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students. Administration reported that staff is “incredibly dedicated and consistently goes above and beyond” to create the best learning and social environment for students. Administration also reported that staff is “superb at forming healthy relationships with our students”—ensuring a sense of belonging.
- The program has a strengths-based philosophy that is organic and evolves based upon student needs with the goal of helping students move from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control—enabling students with the skills needed to function independently in society.
- An outstanding level of collaboration, communication, and consistency relative to the development and implementation of appropriate social, emotional, behavioral, and academic programming for each student enrolled was noted by all staff interviewed.
- The program is invested in strengthening the home-school partnership through daily written communication and phone calls.
- The program provides structured, differentiated and individualized programs of instruction, which includes a blend of 1:1 and small group instructional experiences that address the academic and behavioral needs of students and fosters interactive learning.
- The team reported evidence of well-planned instruction that appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student and aligned with individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives.
- Students enrolled benefit from a variety of enrichment and vocational opportunities that are interest driven, community based, involve service learning, and provide a less restrictive community setting to practice learned social skills. Community partnerships include Spring Glen Church, North Haven Library, Goodwill Industries, local automotive repair shops, banks, grocery stores, recycling center, and senior centers.
- The program has experienced success in transitioning students to a less restrictive instructional setting—in some cases within six (6) months. The program collaborates and coordinates with the local education agency (LEA) for a seamless reintegration into the home school.

2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard B: Administration

A private facility shall have a written policy to assure that it complies with the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Public Law 108-446; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act 20 United States Code Section 1232g; 34 Code of Federal Regulations Part 99, Sections 10-76a to 10-76q, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) and the regulations adopted thereunder; Public Act (PA) No. 96-246 (reporting of child abuse); PA No. 11-232 – An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws; PA No. 12-99 – An Act Concerning the Reporting of Children Placed in Seclusion; and all other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and local requirements.

Issue: As required by the CGS Section 10-222c, as amended by PA No. 16-67, each approved private special education program is required to obtain the information listed on the State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form from all current or former employer(s) of the applicants hired on or after July 1, 2016, if such employer was a local regional board of education, 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. Applicants are required under the law to provide a prospective employer with the name, address, and telephone number of all current or former employers that meet the above criteria. Information may be collected either through a written communication or telephonically.

Of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that an employer verification form was completed for one (1) employee hired after July 1, 2016.

Corrective Action: Provide an attestation to the BSE that the State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form will be obtained for each new employee and that upon obtaining completed forms, the program's chief administrator or education director will make appropriate contact with previous or current employers.

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 from the placing LEA an IEP prior to the enrollment of the student in the private facility. 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 planning and placement team (PPT) meeting that discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to the placement.

Issue(s): In four (4) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, related services indicated on the IEP were not separated/broken out to specify if the delivery of service is provided on a 1:1, small group, or other basis.

Corrective Action: While the program has initiated a process and procedure for the review of an IEP received from the LEA and has identified in writing the need to make corrections, there remains a need for further scrutiny of the IEP document. Submit to BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA’s PPT for students enrolled, demonstrating careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrating the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes.

3. Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered to Elizabeth Ives:

- Continue maintaining the process of reviewing IEPs for appropriateness and accuracy. For example, ensure that related services provided on an individual and small group are broken out/separated.
- Move forth with the plan for expanding upon the development of community partnerships to broaden field vocational experiences.
- Continue exploring expansion of technological resources and the tools and skills necessary for staff to enhance instruction through the use of technology.

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 your written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2025, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Elizabeth Ives:

Approved Ages to Serve:	5–22 years old (Grades K–12)
Approved Student Capacity:	22 Students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2025