



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Pamela DonAroma, Chief Administrator  
Futures School

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

**DATE:** June 15, 2021

**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 *Principles, Procedures and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*, were conducted remotely and in accordance with the approval process.

On May 20, 2021, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of Futures School special education program. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mary Edo, Director of Special Services, Orange Public Schools; and
- Jocelyn Pogitsch, Education Director, Ädelbrook-The Learning Center–Cromwell.

During previous virtual site visit on May 18, 2021, 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 staff.

At the exit conference on May 20, 2021, 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:**

- The leadership, specifically the education director, was described by staff as supportive, responsive, highly visible, very hands-on, and integrally involved in the individualized educational, vocational, and behavioral programming of all students.
- The program has a visionary and supportive senior management team with a student-centered mindset to provide the guidance, direction, and resources needed to meet challenges of struggling students with creativity and stability.
- The overall climate of the program is cheerful, inviting, positive, and reinforcing. Staff interviewed reported they “feel very connected” due to the strong culture of collaboration and clear communication set by the leadership.
- Positive and respectful relationships are well-established between staff and students. Interviewees shared that students feel safe and education staff feels at ease and “feel good about coming to work every day.”
- The program site is bright, spacious, clean and organized. Classrooms are large and colorful. In addition, the classrooms have visuals on the walls, such as nicely framed photos of students engaged in a variety of school and community-based activities.
- Staff interviewed reported they “really love working at the program—strong relationships exist among all school community members.” There is low turnover of personnel and the longevity of staff is attributed to high-quality leadership.
- The program is ideally located near a myriad of community resources, including a library, parks, ball fields, restaurants, bus line, and various types of business entities. The location is perfectly suited for the expansion of individualized community integration and independent skill building.
- The program offers independent student evaluations as determined by the planning and placement team (PPT). For the purpose of recommending appropriate academic, social behavioral, and transition IEP goals and objectives, the independent evaluations include comprehensive educational (cognitive and achievement measures), behavioral assessments, and competency-based community assessments.
- The program employs several “teacher assistants/instructional aides” (each with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in their chosen field of study) who are committed to the school’s mission to help students reach their fullest potential at school and through job coaching in the community setting.
- The program employs a “CORE Team” comprised of a site development coordinator who develops job-site opportunities for students; a transition coordinator who collaborates with community resources, outside agencies, and other entities connecting students toward post-secondary independence; as well as, a transportation coordinator who schedules all program vehicles, maintains records of documents and staff training and endorsement from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

- The program contracts with the YMCA and LA Fitness for students to meet physical education requirements and enjoy physical fitness activities, which promote fitness and health across the program’s student body.
- The program has established a powerful partnership with the University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education as a site for graduate and doctoral students, to provide support and work with students. The program administration looks forward to the continued growth and success of this program.
- Futures School subscribes to the Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) approach developed by Dr. Ross Greene. The CPS model is a cognitive behavioral program with the goal of fostering a collaborative partnership between adults and children to engage students in solving the problems that affect their lives. The CPS model is non-punitive and non-adversarial, decreases the likelihood of conflict, enhances relationships, and improves communication. This model has proven to be effective at Futures School as evidenced by zero seclusions/restraints for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years.
- The program employs a social worker who works directly with students, families, and other team members to develop and implement individualized and group programs that foster student success. The social worker also helps students with issues that affect their school performance and behavior.
- Teacher and related service providers interviewed shared that they work in close collaboration to provide push-in services for students, to support the mission of providing collaborative learning that embraces the values of social inclusion. Specifically, the social worker and speech language pathologist co-teach a social skills group addressing functional language skills and integrate activities to develop student social skills.

## 2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

### **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 health record shall contain, among other documents, the cumulative health record, which includes an updated State of Connecticut Department of Education Health Assessment Record.

**Issue 1:** In four (4) of five (5) student files reviewed, student health assessment records were not current in accordance with the State of Connecticut Department of Education Health Assessment Record requirements.

**Issue 2:** In two (2) of five (5) student files reviewed, there was no evidence of a “record of access” contained within the file.

**Corrective Actions:**

**Issue 1:** Conduct an internal review of the current medical forms for currently enrolled students. Require that those students get an updated physical as needed or attain the State of Connecticut Department of Education Health Assessment Records. Provide an attestation to the BSE that the program has reviewed health records of all currently enrolled students, to ensure that the State of Connecticut Department of Education Health Assessment Record is complete and current.

**Issue 2:** Provide the BSE with attestation that all student files have been reviewed to ensure that a “record of access” form is available in each student file.

**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 the enrollment of the student. 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 enrollment.

**Issue:** In three (3) 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 basis.

**Corrective Action:** Implement a procedure to be utilized upon receipt of an IEP after participating in a PPT meeting, to ensure that all the information in the IEP is complete and accurate and Futures School can implement the supports and services outlined in the document as written (i.e., require clarification of all related service whether it is provided individually or within a group setting). The review and any subsequent communication with the responsible district must be done in a timely manner and must then be reflected in the student file. It is strongly recommended that written documentation of requested changes in the IEP be attached to the current IEP, to ensure that the IEP can be implemented with fidelity. Submit to the BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA’s PPT for students enrolled. Ensure that the IEP demonstrates careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrates the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes.

**Standard H: 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 confidential. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants and that the applicant submit to a records check of the Department of Children and Families Child Abuse and Neglect Registry 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. The current and/or former information shall be obtained 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 Section 10-221d.

**Issue:** A review of personnel files indicated that while there was documentation of some required elements of the staff file in two (2) of the five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing that fingerprinting was conducted within 30 days of hire.

**Corrective Action:** For the next three (3) new hires, provide documentation that fingerprints were submitted within 30 days of hire. Review all current staff files to ensure that fingerprinting has been done, and if not, they are to be done immediately.

### 3. **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that your program consider taking the following action:

- Consider providing opportunities for paraprofessionals to participate in professional development activities focused on their role in the PPT process. Parents may request paraprofessionals to attend their child’s PPT meeting in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act.
- Move forth with the plan to expand technology to support students in their learning through the provision of individual student iPads.
- Consider providing the program “instructional aides” with professional development focused on the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), to ensure that as students become more competent with a specific skill, less support is provided to allow the student to perform the task independently.
- Provide opportunities to advance professional development activities for teachers that target evidence-based instructional strategies and methodologies. Explore additional opportunities for teachers to benefit from collaboration with educators outside of the program, to ensure that they remain current in the implementation of the Connecticut Core Standards and other best practices—observing general education or special education settings to which students might transition will promote the consideration of realistic and targeted goals for students enrolled.
- Continue to provide opportunities for students to participate together in small group academic instruction, extracurricular, and various school-wide activities.
- Consider inviting parents into the school to be present for their child’s “work plan and product presentation” as an additional means of promoting family engagement.
- Continue to expand the successful efforts to pursue grants, to provide the students enrolled with access to a variety of activities based on student interests and needs.

Pamela DonAroma, Chief Administrator  
Preliminary Evaluation Report – Futures School  
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program  
June 15, 2021

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, 2026, will be submitted to the Acting Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Futures School:

<b>Approved Ages to Serve:</b>	14–22 years old (Grades 9–12)
<b>Approved Student Capacity:</b>	24 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2026

cc: Ed Orszulak, Ph.D., Education Director