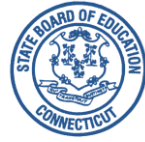




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Kikke Levin Gerdner, Ed.D., Chief Administrator  
Grace S. Webb 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 April 22, 2021, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of Grace S. Webb School (Grace Webb) special education program. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Laura Klimaszewski, Director of Special Education, Torrington Public Schools; and
- Lisa Riggi, Education Director, Aspire Living and Learning.

During previous virtual site visit on April 20, 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 March 18, 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:**

- Staff interviewed described the program administration as very supportive, collaborative, and integrally involved in the individualized educational and behavioral programming of all students.
- The overall climate and culture of the program is inviting, positive, and reinforcing. Staff members greet students each morning upon arrival to gauge their mood and experiences ensuring students feel welcome and safe.
- The program has a strong mental health component, which provides the ability to integrate social-emotional learning into daily teaching and instruction with the support of psychologists and psychiatrists who are readily available.
- Assessments support the development of the appropriate individualized program and may include educational, medical/medication, psychiatric, psychological and neuropsychological, speech/language, vocational, occupational therapy, or other specifically requested evaluations.
- Students receive instruction in language arts, mathematics (including consumer education), physical education, health/safety, science, and social studies. Additionally, they receive instruction in art, cooking, horticulture, vocational and career education (which may include supportive job experience), speech and language services, occupational therapy, and computer science instruction may be offered as part of a student's programming.
- The program has invested in improving its academic reading data collection to align with that of public schools including Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) measures of academic progress (MAP) assessments K–12, Fountas and Pinnell, and Quick Phonics/Quick Spelling Screener. The program has increased teacher competency in reading intervention and instruction through the provision of professional development in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school year. Current focus is also on improving and expanding the K–8 mathematics curriculum.
- Staff share an appreciation for teamwork. A related service provider interviewed shared that interdisciplinary team meetings are held daily, which include administrators, teachers, and psychologists and psychiatrists to address student's behavioral, emotional, and developmental needs.
- Collaboration and engagement with families is a program priority. Daily communication logs are sent home to parents to strengthen communication. A teacher interviewed shared that she follows-up with families of students who are absent.
- Teachers and related service providers report that professional learning opportunities are abundant and diverse. A list of available professional development opportunities is sent to staff weekly. Staff members may request to attend outside professional learning activities and receive reimbursement.

- Grace S. Webb School subscribes to a positive behavior support approach focused on strength-based positive relational intervention practice, attachment theory, and trauma-based treatment theory.
- The program has experienced a reduction in the need for the use of emergency seclusion and restraint due to the provision of intervention programs, including the In-sight Mindfulness, Risking Connection, Relational Model, and In-the-Moment Teaching.
- Upon arriving to school, students engage in a “Webb in Motion” activity of their choice. They may select from physical activities to get energized in an appropriate way and which helps to “get them grounded.” Optional activities included, but are not limited to, are yoga, Zumba, and exercise in the outdoor courtyard.
- The program employs a relational model, which incorporates the tenets of restorative practice and focuses on helping students to develop intrinsic de-escalation and coping skills. Students engage in restorative work to repair relationships that were impacted during incidents. The staff at Grace Webb is committed to helping students realize their potential through building positive relationships with students and utilizing positive strength-based intervention strategies in a non-punitive environment.
- The program has a very strong mental health clinical component. Students and staff benefit from the support of a registered nurse, clinical social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists on staff.
- The program has a licensed clinical social worker in the position of admissions director who has a strong understanding of student’s clinical needs and ensures the program is an appropriate placement for the student.

## 2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

### **Standard F: Program Requirements**

The local school district is responsible for the development and appropriateness of a student’s individualized education program (IEP) and any changes made in that IEP. Each private facility shall request an IEP from the placing local education agency (LEA) prior to the enrollment of the student in the private facility. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction of 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, which discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to enrollment.

**Issue:** In one (1) 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:** Submit to the BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. Ensure that the IEPs demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrate 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 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:** In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form was completed for three (3) employees hired after July 1, 2016, in accordance with Public Act 16-67.

**Corrective Action:** Develop and implement a process for maintaining the necessary documentation within the staff file, which includes the verification that a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form was completed. On or before June 30, 2021, submit to the BSE a checklist to be used (which includes all required/recommended items), to ensure appropriate documentation and verification within each personnel file and consistency across personnel files. Provide documentation that the employment verification form was implemented for the next three (3) staff hired.

**3. Recommendations:**

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

- Explore opportunities to improve information technology (IT) support and connectivity availability through Hartford Hospital or the implementation of an independent carrier to support internet accessibility within the school program.
- Consider hiring or assigning a staff internally to repair and maximize the use of existing program technology and to provide technology support for all staff (staff interviewed reported that “overall, technology is glitchy and IT support is needed”).
- Consider increasing daily opportunities for teacher-to-teacher collaboration and planning time and to complete progress monitoring activities.

- Develop a stronger communication process for collaborating LEAs for planning student’s re-integration into their public school.
- Consider changing the appearance of the middle school environment. Staff interviewed reported that the environment is very “hospital-like and sterile looking” and would like it to “feel more like a school atmosphere.”
- Move forth with the plan to explore and expand upon opportunities for students in the vocational program who have achieved their high school credits.
- Continue to explore academic and behavior progress monitoring tools. Support education staff with professional development focused on data collection and progress monitoring tools utilized.

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 Grace S. Webb School:

- Approved Ages to Serve:** 4–22 years old (Grades K–12)
- Approved Student Capacity:** 150 students
- Approval Expiration Date:** June 30, 2026