



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Jill Bourbeau, Chief Administrator
Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School

FROM: Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant ^{DP}
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: November 26, 2021

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

On October 7, 2021, an evaluation team visited Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Dr. Beth Giller, Director of Pupil and Staff Support Services; and
- Dr. Gwen Killheffer, Education Director and Principal, Solterra Academy.

During a previous site visit on September October 5, 2021, Dr. Papa 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 7, 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

termination of enrollment

Commendations:

The overall climate and culture of the Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School was described as warm, inviting, positive, supportive, and engaging. A related service provider interviewed shared that there is a strong connection between the school and residential clinical director to ensure “all pieces are in place through collaboration and looking at the whole child.”

Staff described the leadership, specifically the education director, as organized, responsive, and highly supportive of the entire educational team.

Classroom environments are bright, welcoming, clean, and organized—with window views of beautiful outdoor greenery. Shelves were abundantly filled with high-interest books for all levels.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Teachers observed provided lesson plans aligned with Connecticut Core Standards. Lesson goals and objectives were clearly stated and posted during the course of the lesson. Instruction was structured but fluid as needed. There was laughter and humor in the classroom evidencing a good rapport between teacher and students.

Staff interviewed expressed that they share an appreciation of the need for collaboration and teamwork.

The small class sizes promote student engagement and individualized academic support. Overall, the school provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff is committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students.

The school affords teachers and related service personnel with opportunities to access off-site professional development activities of individual interest at no cost.

Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel

Each private facility shall ensure that:

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. In addition, the private facility shall ensure the applicants submit to a Department of Children and Families Child Abuse and Neglect Registry records 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 an 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. CGS Section 10-221d.

Issue: In one (1) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing that a *State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification* form was completed for an employee hired after July 1, 2016.

Corrective Action: On or before December 30, 2021, submit to the BSE attestation that a *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 J: Health and Safety

A private facility shall conduct monthly emergency drills that shall include one crisis response drill other than a fire drill once every three (3) months.

Issue(s): In reviewing emergency drill records, fire drills were documented to occur monthly. However, there was no evidence that emergency drills were conducted.

Corrective Action: On or before December 30, 2021, 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 following recommendations are offered to Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School:

Explore opportunities to improve IT support and connectivity availability through Hartford Health Care or the implementation of an independent carrier to support internet accessibility within the school program.

Increase opportunities for both students and staff to benefit from greater access to technology.

Consider refining the existing protocol for communicating with local education agencies to ensure student records including, but not limited to, the individualized education program are obtained no later than one (1) week of the student’s admission into the program.

Retain a copy of each student’s cumulative health records in individual student education files in addition to the existing practice of retaining records electronically in the Natchaug Hospital’s electronic record.

Consider developing a communication protocol with the hospital clinical staff to collaboratively “process” with a student following the occurrence of episodes of dysregulation in school—to jointly determine the student’s readiness for returning (“hand-off”) to the school environment.

Maintain a written plan for ongoing personnel development, including a professional development policy that shall include the provision of 18 hours of professional development to staff each year at no cost, professional development opportunities aligned to individual educator evaluations in support of areas of identified need, and the proper documentation of professional development activities.

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Consider scheduling for a school representative(s) to attend “clinical rounds” each morning to increase collaboration between the school and hospital staff.

Teaching staff interviewed expressed they would appreciate “more variety in professional development instead of just required hospital related trainings.” Consider disseminating a professional development and training interest survey to education staff.

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 the Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School’s written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through December 30, 2026, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Natchaug Hospital Inpatient School:

- Approved Ages to Serve:** 5–22 years old (Grades Kindergarten through 12)
- Approved Capacity:** 24 students
- Approval Expiration Date:** December 30, 2026

cc: Mr. Shawn Cyr, Education Director