



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Jill Bourbeau, Chief Administrator
Natchaug Hospital Journey House 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 September 30, 2021, an evaluation team visited Natchaug Hospital Journey House School to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Dr. Steven Bayne, Director of Special Services, Regional School District 19; and
- Mr. Jon Oddo, Education Director, Northwest Village School at Wheeler Clinic.

During a previous site visit on September 28, 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 September 30, 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 Journey House School was described as warm, inviting, 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 highly collaborative, supportive of the entire educational team, and expressed appreciation for administration's frequent visits into classrooms.

Classrooms were described as clean, quiet, and organized.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Teachers had identified goals and objectives that were clearly stated and posted during the course of the lesson. Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. Students observed were engaged in their instruction and demonstrated a willingness to take risks.

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 are 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.

The school implements positive behavioral interventions and a support model across settings, which provides a strong foundation for the implementation of the treatment plan developed for each student and articulated through an individualized behavior support plan.

Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard I: 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 (CGS) Section 10-221d.

Issue(s): In five (5) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no documentation evidencing that a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form was completed for employees 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.

Issue: In three (3) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, there was no evidence that a request for a fingerprinting check was submitted.

Corrective Action: On or before, December 30, 2021, submit to the BSE evidence that state and national fingerprinting checks have been submitted for the three personnel identified during the file review process. (The program has been provided the names of the three personnel). Additionally, on or before December 30, 2021, provide the BSE with attestation that a state and national fingerprinting check will be submitted within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-221d.

Develop and implement a process for maintaining the necessary documentation within the staff file that includes the verification that a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form and fingerprinting for criminal background checks were completed. On or before December 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.

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 every third drill was a crisis drill.

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 Natchuag Hospital Journey House 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. This is essential given the academic/cognitive strengths of students enrolled and would further support preparation for postsecondary education and employment.

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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.

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.

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 Journey House 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 Journey House School:

Approved Ages to Serve: 12–22 years old (Grades 6–12)

Approved Capacity: 12 students

Approval Expiration Date: December 30, 2026

cc: Mr. Shawn Cyr, Education Director