




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ana Wittig, Chief Administrator
Oak Hill School

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

On October 22, 2020, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of the Oak Hill School (Oak Hill) special education program. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Ed.D., BSE;
- Pauline Smith, Director of Special Services (retired); and
- Sharon Murphy, Education Director, Devereux Glenholme School.

During previous virtual site visits on October 15 and 16, 2020, Ms. Hayles reviewed the education files of students and other application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration. In addition, Dr. Papa conducted staff file reviews.

At the exit conference on October 22, 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:

- The program supports a highly inclusive delivery model that is unique to approved private special education programs in Connecticut. Classrooms are located in ideal natural environments enhancing the opportunities for students to integrate with typical peers whether it is within a public school environment or community-based setting.
- The program skillfully provides a highly individualized community-based educational program that serves students who require functional academic instruction, daily living skill development, fine and gross motor development, communication skill development, participation in the community, social skills instruction, and the development of self-advocacy.
- The program provides a high student/teacher ratio, appropriate to the individual needs of each student, through a trans-disciplinary approach delivered by an array of educational staff and related service staff. The diverse staff includes, but is not limited to, art and music therapists, licensed practical nurses, and behavior specialists. Students and staff are further supported by access to a technology specialist, the support of a dedicated professional development (PD) coordinator, and medical supports through a program psychiatrist and vision specialist.
- Staff exhibit a remarkable passion and level of enthusiasm related to their role in support of their students and their families. Collaboration, flexibility, and creativity of staff were noted by the team, as well as, an enthusiasm to “think outside the box” in order to address the needs of students and their families.
- The facilities and in-district classrooms are well maintained and have been updated, designed, and renovated to meet the access and instructional needs of the students served.
- Static visual representations are found in all instructional settings, providing consistent cues and expectations for both students and staff within a language rich environment.
- Students benefit from a variety of experiences within the instructional settings, which include, but are not limited to, access to a campus greenhouse, 3-D printer, printing equipment, and participation in community activities such as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Salmon Project.
- Students, staff, and families benefit from access to technology support via the program’s technology specialist and innovations and resources available through the New England Assistive Technology Center. The program recently invested in two robots to assist in increasing student engagement in remote learning.
- The program has made a significant investment in the acquisition of platforms such as Power School to centralize program and student data and improve access to information and communication with the districts served.
- The individualized education program (IEP) elements proposed by Oak Hill staff and documented in the IEPs reviewed were highly individualized and comprehensive. Evidence of ongoing data collection to monitor student growth and progress was noted by the team.

- New staff are supported by an “on-boarding program” of support as well as a “buddy” assigned to provide support and mentoring within and across the setting.
- Students benefit from the integration of alternative therapies such as art therapy, music therapy, and yoga therapy.
- Highly qualified, committed, and experienced administrators effectively navigate the challenge of administering programs and supporting classrooms in a variety of public school and community settings. Staff indicated that they benefit from a high level of support from directors and other administrators.
- The lessons observed provided evidence of a focus on truly functional academic and skill development supporting the program’s philosophy that all students are learners.
- The program has proactively implemented elements of the teacher evaluation system to all staff through modification of the rubric, to address expectations and proficiencies. This initiative has united staff in working toward common goals. The program provides a comprehensive PD plan that provides numerous and relevant opportunities for training and supporting all staff.
- The program boasts an active and influential PD and evaluation committee. The PD coordinator provides development, oversight, and monitoring of activities and opportunities provided. PD is characterized by staff as relevant and applicable to their work. Additional opportunities for professional growth are noted as always being available at staff request.
- The program has recently added a quality assurance position to assist in maintaining program accountability and to support effective programming for students.

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 No. (PA) 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 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 eight (8) 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.

3. Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered to Oak Hill:

- Continue to conduct careful review of each IEP developed and documented by the LEA to assure that essential components are accurate and complete, focusing on accuracy in describing the year-round programming determined necessary, to address the needs of students and the opportunities for time with nondisabled peers afforded through access to the community.
- Continue to enhance the “on-boarding” opportunities and supports for new staff, to promote inclusivity and increase the longevity.
- Consider further supporting the engagement of students in remote learning now and moving forward through the support of an assigned “Remote/Learning and Engagement Specialist.”
- Consider assigning an additional education director and enhanced human resources, to address the needs of students and families—given the impact of the program model to provide instruction in a number of public schools and community settings and in an effort to grow resources for program infrastructure.

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 December 30, 2025, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Oak Hill:

Approved Ages to Serve:	3–14 years old (Grades PK–10)
Approved Student Capacity:	12 students
30 Antolini Road, New Hartford, CT	

Approved Ages to Serve:	3–22 years old (Grades PK–12)
Approved Student Capacity:	42 students
47 Upson Street, Bristol, CT	

Approved Ages to Serve:	3–14 years old (Grades PK–8)
Approved Student Capacity:	6 students
314 Main Street, Portland, CT	

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Approved Ages to Serve: 12–22 years old (Grades 6–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 10 students
95 Little City Road, Higganum, CT

Approved Ages to Serve: 10–22 years old (Grades 4–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 24 students
150 Northwest Drive, Plainville, CT

Approved Ages to Serve: 12–22 years old (Grades 7–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 16 students
120 Holcomb Street, Hartford, CT (class A)

Approved Ages to Serve: 3–22 years old (Grades PK–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 20 students
120 Holcomb Street, Hartford, CT (class B)

Approved Ages to Serve: 15–22 years old (Grades 7–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 25 students
83 Jones Street, Hebron, CT

Approved Ages to Serve: 5–22 years old (K–12)
Approved Student Capacity: 15 students
150 Fisher Drive, Avon, CT

Approval Expiration Date (all sites): December 30, 2025

cc: Mark Hendrick, Education Director
Robert Parenti, Education Director
Breanna Guida, Education Director