



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



January 30, 2023

Mr. John Molteni
Chief Administrator
Prism Academy
166 Lincoln Street
Berlin, CT 06037

Dear Mr. Molteni:

Attached is the preliminary evaluation report for Prism Academy based on the findings of a Bureau of Special Education (BSE) evaluation team. The report contains commendations, standard deficiencies with corrective actions, and recommendations.

Please indicate in writing whether your program agrees with the report and accepts the delineated corrective action plan. The response must be sent to Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant; Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE); Bureau of Special Education-APSEPs; P.O. Box 2219; Hartford, CT 06145-2219 or dori.papa@ct.gov. Upon receipt of written acceptance of the report in its entirety, the BSE will submit a recommendation for program approval through January 30, 2028, to the Commissioner of Education.

We wish to thank you and your staff for the full support and cooperation extended to the Department's program review team. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Papa by telephone at 860-713-6923 or by e-mail at dori.papa@ct.gov.

Sincerely,

Bryan Klimkiewicz
Special Education Division Director

BK:dp

cc: Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, CSDE
Ms. Catherine Riker, Education Director



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Mr. John Molteni, Chief Administrator
Prism Academy

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

DATE: January 30, 2023

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

On December 7, 2022, an evaluation team visited Prism Academy to conduct an on-site program review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Robin Anne Carey, Director of Pupil Services, Cheshire Public Schools; and
- Katie Cyr, Senior Education Director, Aspire Living and Learning Academy.

During a previous site visit on November 15, 2022, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa has reviewed the application materials your administration submitted to the BSE.

At the exit conference on December 7, 2022, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The following areas of the special education program were 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 program's overall climate and culture was described as inviting, positive, harmonious, friendly, supportive, engaging, academically challenging, and structured.

Staff interviewed shared that the leadership, specifically the education director, is highly collaborative and motivating, enthusiastic, organized, maintains an open-door policy, and supportive of the entire educational team.

The program provides a learning environment that supports student independence in critical domains, including academics, communication, social and emotional development, adaptive living, play and leisure, health and safety, and vocational skills.

Prism Academy utilizes a relationship-based model that focuses on building trusting relationships with students throughout their educational journey as the foundation for supporting social-emotional and behavioral development.

The program utilizes the online Central Reach data collection platform to collect "real time" academic and behavioral progress monitoring.

Collaboration and communication were described as program strengths. Related service providers interviewed reported a high level of collaboration with the entire education team. The education and clinical team engage in weekly clinical meetings, to review student's academic, social, emotional, and behavioral present levels of performance for planning highly individualized programming.

Classrooms were described as spacious, clean, quiet, and organized—with natural lighting.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. The program primarily utilizes the Unique Curriculum in which instructional content, process, and products are aligned with individual student interests, readiness levels, and preferential learning modalities. The program also has access to Edmark, Wilson Reading Program, and Touchmath.

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 program engages in continuous performance improvement through an analysis of teaching procedures and behavioral supports with a student-centered approach allowing for frequent changes and adjustments, to meet evolving student needs.

The school implements positive behavioral interventions and a support model across settings—providing a strong foundation when implementing the treatment plan developed for each student and articulated through an individualized behavior support plan. Board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) oversight is such that they are present in classrooms multiple hours each day.

Standard Deficiencies:

Prism Academy must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

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 LEA prior to student enrollment and at least annually thereafter. For students placed by other agencies, the private facility should obtain an IEP after placement as soon as feasible from the district having educational jurisdiction. 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 planning and placement team (PPT) meeting, which discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to student enrollment.

Issue(s): In four of five IEPs reviewed, the related services identified in the IEP were not reflected appropriately—the duration, frequency, and setting of service delivery were not clearly identified.

Corrective Action: Implement a procedure to utilize upon receipt of an IEP after participating in a PPT meeting. Said procedure shall ensure that all the information in the IEP is complete and accurate and Prism Academy can implement the supports and services outlined in the document as written (i.e., require clarification of all related service duration, frequency, and whether it is provided individually or within a group setting). Submit to the BSE copies of the next three IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. The copies shall demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness and if needed, illustrate the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes.

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(s) 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 the applicant's current or former employer(s) 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) 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) for staff working directly with students.

Issue: In one of five personnel files reviewed, a request for state and national fingerprinting check was submitted late—not within 30 days of hire.

Corrective Action: On or before, February 28, 2023, submit to the BSE 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 verification that state and national fingerprinting for criminal background checks were completed. On or before February 28, 2023, 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.

Recommendations:

The BSE offers the following recommendations to Prism Academy:

Contact the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Talent Office to arrange for the program's chief administrator to participate in Connecticut's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) training for administrators ([CSDE Evaluation Training](#)). The program's chief administrator is responsible for conducting evaluations for the program's education director.

Provide training to staff in the Central Reach data collection platform. Related service providers interviewed expressed interest in receiving training in the online data collection system to enable them to use it in conjunction with teaching and BCBA staff.

Provide teachers with additional planning/collaboration time. Teachers interviewed expressed the need for additional "build-in" planning time to increase opportunities for 1:1 collaboration among teachers.

Develop a system for communicating/collaborating with parents. Teachers interviewed expressed the need to develop a system of communication and collaboration with parents particularly in the IEP development process.

Ensure that all staff are familiar with the [Connecticut Special Education Data System](#) (CT-SEDS) through participating in training opportunities. At the time of the program review, the program's education director was the only staff member who participated in the CT-SEDS training.

Expand the occupational therapy program with the purchase of sensory equipment to enhance student learning through improving their visual, auditory, and tactile processing as well as fine and gross motor skills. The occupational therapist shared that there is a need for a typing/keyboard program to address students' fine motor skill deficits.

Increase opportunities for both students and staff to benefit from greater technology access. Teachers interviewed expressed the need to be provided with training and modeling in augmentative and alternative devices.

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Update existing technology and purchase new technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning.

Move forth with the plan to find or make space for a music room and to hire a music teacher.

Move forth with the plan to begin utilizing the school “art barn.”

Move forth with the plan to create a health room in the administrative building adjacent to the school and to hire a school nurse.

Continue exploring scientifically-based reading programs that are aligned with activities and strategies supported by research for various student skill levels.

Provide opportunities for teachers and related service personnel to visit and observe public school classrooms as well as other nonpublic school settings where students may transition upon a PPT recommendation. A clear understanding of the expectations, (academic and social/emotional) instructional models, and level of expected self-advocacy will assist in preparing students for this transition.

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 Prism Academy’s written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the Bureau will submit a recommendation for a five-year program approval through January 30, 2028, to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Prism Academy:

Approved Ages to Serve: 3 through 14 years old

Approved Grades to Serve: Pre-K through 8th

Approved Capacity: 30 students

Approval Expiration Date: January 30, 2028

cc: Catherine Riker, Education Director