



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Dr. Steven Girelli, Chief Administrator
Raymond Hill School

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

DATE: May 31, 2023

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

On March 2, 2023, an evaluation team visited Raymond Hill School (Raymond Hill) to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/the Bureau);
- Cheryl Kissel, Director of Special Services, Bethany Public School District; and
- Deana Tyler, Regional Director, High Road Schools of New England.

During a previous site visit on March 1, 2023, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa reviewed the application materials your administration submitted to the BSE.

At the exit conference on March 2, 2023, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The approval process included a review of the program's:

- 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.

Commendations:

Staff interviewed shared that the leadership, specifically the education director, is highly collaborative, readily available to provide support, and maintains open dialogue with all staff. The education director was greeting and communicating with students in a warm and friendly manner.

The program, housed in a beautiful facility, is clean and organized with an abundance of windows and natural light. Classrooms are large and colorful with student work and art products displayed. Raymond Hill equips classrooms with individual student "quiet corners," which provide students with opportunities to work independently.

A positive climate and culture were evident by the positive respectful relationships among students and between staff and students.

As described, collaboration is a program strength. Staff interviewed shared that there are highly collaborative individualized education program (IEP) development and monitoring processes in place. The multidisciplinary team meets regularly during structured time set for communication and collaboration. The multidisciplinary team frequently meets to review strengths, challenges, learning strategies, and the effectiveness of academic and behavioral interventions. Raymond Hill utilizes a decision-making collaboration model in which “every staff member has a voice.”

The evaluation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards, which appeared appropriate given the current level of performance for each student. Teachers differentiated instructional content, process, and work products evidencing high student participation and engagement.

The program implements a schoolwide system of positive behavioral interventions and supports. A restorative model complements this approach very effectively. The model seeks to “catch both the students and staff doing the right thing” and then focuses on celebrating their successes within the program.

The program is known as a leader in trauma-informed care and trains other agencies in the Risking Connection (RC) program. The program embeds this philosophy into all clinical and educational school components. The RC training is mandatory for all Raymond Hill staff and refresher trainings occur throughout the year.

Students have access to a variety of vocational course offerings, including culinary; woodworking; auto restoration; art (pottery, drawing, painting, and crafting); music, including instrumental music and song writing; physical education; environmental science, including botany and astronomy; and technology education highlighted by 3-D printers, robotics, coding, engineering, graphic design, computer-aided design, and photography.

The program has a full-size built in swimming pool and certified in-house lifeguards.

The program houses an exceptional sensory/occupational therapy (OT) gym to address student needs. One half of the gym has equipment to address the symptoms of students who experience under stimulation. The other half of the gym addresses the needs of students who experience over stimulation symptoms. Students who utilize the sensory gym receive OT services as identified in their IEPs.

Students have access to therapy pets, including two therapy dogs and two others in training. Students work with abused horses and the environmental science class has reptiles, snakes, rabbits, guinea pigs, and turtles. Students engage in hatching quail eggs and participate in the Salmon Release Program.

Raymond Hill provides the LIVE component to address the vocational needs of 17–22-year-old students who have completed their academic credits for graduation but require vocational, life skills and/or other educational supports. Students spend 80 percent of their time in the community at worksites and 20 percent of the time working on prevocational and independent living skills on campus. Vocational experiences are based upon transition assessments, which focus on the student’s strengths, preferences, and interests. A job coach supports students at each work site. The program evaluates students on their workplace competencies in addition to the specific tasks they perform.

Standard Deficiencies:

Raymond Hill School 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 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. 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 student's current performance levels, 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. For students placed by other agencies, the private facility should obtain an IEP from the district having educational jurisdiction as soon as feasible after placement.

Issue(s): In one (1) of five (5) IEPs reviewed, the IEP did not appropriately reflect the related services identified on page 11. Specifically, the IEP did not clearly identify speech/language therapy and occupational therapy services as provided individually or within a small group.

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 Raymond Hill can implement the supports and services outlined in the document as written (i.e., require clarification of whether the program will provide any related service individually or within a group setting). Submit to the BSE copies of the next three (3) IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. The copies shall demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness and if needed, illustrate implementation of written notification to the district requesting necessary changes (retain in student file). On or before June 23, 2023, submit to the BSE a copy of the process/procedures developed to review IEPs and the manner Raymond Hill will use to notify/inform districts.

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 it holds said file in confidence. The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants. The private facility shall ensure the applicants submit to a Department of Children and Families (DCF) Child Abuse and Neglect Registry records check before hiring staff who will work directly with students. In addition, the program shall ensure submission of state and national criminal history records checks (fingerprinting) within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment for staff who work directly with students. CGS Section 10-22d.

Issue: In five (5) of five (5) personnel files reviewed, submission dates for criminal, fingerprinting and DCF background checks were not available to evidence submission requests within 30 days of hire. However, as evidenced in the responses Raymond Hill received, respective agencies had conducted all background checks.

Corrective Action: On or before June 23, 2023, submit to the BSE attestation that the program will document submission date requests of criminal, fingerprinting, and DCF background checks in individual personnel files to evidence submission requests were within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment in accordance with CGS Section 10-22d.

Standard J: Health and Safety - A private facility shall conduct monthly emergency drills that include one crisis response drill other than a fire drill once every three months.

Issue: In reviewing emergency drill records, Raymond Hill documented fire drills as occurring monthly. However, there was no evidence that every third drill was a crisis drill.

Corrective Action: On or before June 23, 2023, 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 BSE offers the following recommendations to Raymond Hill School:

Consider purchasing interactive SMART or Promethean Boards for classrooms. Staff interviewed expressed the need for updated and/or new technology. During observations, a teacher was standing on a chair to turn on the ceiling-mounted projector and the evaluation team perceived this as a safety issue.

Continue efforts to hire additional special education teachers. Explore and implement strategies to recruit and maintain qualified staff through activities such as outreach to college teacher preparation programs, the provision of additional incentives, and a review of salaries and benefits.

Move forth with the plan to hire a full-time psychiatrist, an advanced practice registered nurse, and board-certified behavior analysts.

Maintain a list of professional development and training activities in each personnel file that identifies the date, topic, duration, and cumulative hours of training evidencing the provision of 18 hours of professional development and training annually and funded by the program.

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 planning and placement team 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 Raymond Hill School's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the Bureau will submit a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2028, to the Commissioner of Education.

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

Approved Ages to Serve:	5 to 22 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	1st through 12th
Approved Enrollment Capacity:	126 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2028

cc: Jane Morris, Education Director