



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Stephen Bell, Chief Administrator  
The Foundation School-Orange

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

**DATE:** June 20, 2024

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

On March 14, 2024, an evaluation team visited The Foundation School-Orange (Foundation-Orange), to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mary Edo, Director of Special Services, Orange Public Schools; and
- Alyssa Mullins, Education Director, Ädelbrook Academy of Cromwell.

During a previous site visit on March 12, 2024, 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 March 14, 2024, 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:**

Foundation-Orange is approved to serve students ages 3 through 18 with a high staff to student ratio of 1:2. The program provides a language-based approach with emphasis on speech language, perceptual/motor and social skills development in addition to school readiness and academic skills.

Program interviewees shared that the leadership (specifically the education director) is highly collaborative with, and supportive of, staff and families; and knowledgeable and involved in all aspects of the program. The professional staff's employment longevity reflects effective leadership. Staff opinion is sought and valued.

Collaboration among disciplines, required to address the program's mission, creates a supportive, nurturing, and positive culture of lifelong learners.

Staff interviewed described the program's climate and culture as "highly collaborative with family-like relationships and very upbeat." A positive school climate is evidenced by positive respectful relationships between staff and students with "lots of smile exchanges."

There is a strong focus on parent engagement on a variety of levels. Lines of communication are always open with parents and caregivers via frequent parent team meetings, phone calls, emails, and daily notebook communication between home and school. Parents are integrally involved in the development of their child's individualized education program (IEP) process. Parents are invited to many school events, including, but not limited to, birthday parties, holiday events, graduations, and weekend activities with students and their families. The program provides professional development (PD) for parents focused on topics such as social communication, emotional regulation, and health and wellness. Program staff also provide home support through collaboration with community-based providers.

The program's goal is to promote verbal and nonverbal communication for all students to address the individual communication needs of students with autism spectrum disorder and other language-based communication disorders. Both processes of communication are promoted across settings utilizing a multi-modal approach paired with current technology and evidenced-based practices. All students receive intensive speech and language pathology services daily.

The school environment is described as bright, inviting, calm, friendly, quiet, structured, and conducive to learning. Classrooms are rich with visuals, including student art and work products displayed. Staff are characterized as warm, caring, dedicated, and focused on developing positive relationships with students. Staff "go above and beyond" their assigned duties such as participating in after-school hour and weekend activities with students and their families.

The program's speech and language pathologists (SLPs) are knowledgeable and proficient in programming and provide discrete trials for a variety of alternative and augmentative communication devices. The SLP team addresses language skills that are vital to a student's academic achievement, such as reading, language arts, math, and others. A variety of formats are used to address these skills, including discussion, role-play, participation in hands-on activities, and community-based experiences. The SLPs encourage an open and positive collaboration with student's parents, outside providers, and local education agencies to ensure generalization of communication skills across settings.

The observation team reported evidence of highly individualized, well-planned instruction aligned with Connecticut Core Standards, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Students observed were characterized as attentive and engaged in their learning.

Students are provided with explicit and integrated social-emotional learning opportunities daily in a small group setting and as determined by each child's IEP. Social skills curricula include The Zones of Regulation, Social Thinking curriculum and Social Express. Evidence-based methods of teaching include video modeling, peer modeling, role playing, integration of social skills through recreational nights and community outings.

The program provides occupational therapy services as determined by each child's IEP. Occupational therapists work collaboratively with program staff and parents to address each student's sensory, motor, perceptual, mobility, and self-help challenges. Therapeutic activities and strategies are integrated into the school curriculum and support students in all aspects of the learning environment.

As part of the school-wide job exploration initiative, the program invites visitors and guest speakers on a regular basis, including Judge Cherie Phoenix-Sharpe for Reading Across America, The Whale 102.9 radio station, Furry Critters presentations, local fire and police departments, servicemen and women from the Armed Forces, local sports coaches and advisors, speakers providing demonstrations on their professions, postal workers, custodians, and office assistants.

Staff interviewed expressed an appreciation for PD opportunities. A review of personnel files indicates diversity in PD activities evidenced through the program's administrative plan and maintenance of an individual PD log for each staff member. Staff members are encouraged to attend outside PD opportunities of interest specific to their role and funded by the program.

Teachers interviewed shared that the "IEP development and progress monitoring process is a highly collaborative multidisciplinary approach." Program staff implement a team approach regarding their contributions to the planning and placement team (PPT) in developing each student's IEP. The school team develops IEP goals and objectives that align with the Connecticut Core Standards, supporting school curriculum, and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association standards.

### **Standard Deficiencies:**

The Foundation-Orange must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

**Standard G: Evaluation of Student Progress and Reporting Responsibilities** - The private special education program shall submit each child's progress reports, based on the student's IEP goals and objectives, to the responsible local education agency (LEA) or sending agency and parents/guardians in accordance with the reporting schedule and child's IEP content requirements as determined by the PPT. These reports must be communicated in a language that is easily understood by parents/guardians. Each private facility shall notify and send written reports to parents/guardians or sending agency regarding disciplinary measures employed (e.g., in-school or out-of-school suspension), which substantially removes the student from those program activities related to the child's IEP for extended periods of time.

**Issue:** In five (5) of five (5) student files reviewed, there was no evidence that the child's progress reports were submitted to the responsible LEA.

**Corrective Action:** On or before, June 30, 2024, provide the BSE with attestation that the Foundation-Orange will submit reports of each child's progress, based on the student's IEP goals and objectives, to the responsible LEA or sending agency and parents/guardians in accordance with the reporting schedule and child's IEP content requirements as determined by the PPT.

Provide evidence to the BSE that Foundation-Orange submitted progress reports to the placing local education agencies and parents/guardians, or surrogate parent, if appointed, for all students enrolled during the 2023-24 academic year in accordance with Standard G of the *Principles, Procedures and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*.

### **Recommendations:**

The BSE offers the following recommendations to The Foundation School-Orange:

Move forth with the plan to expand the program's playground to include sensory/adaptive equipment.

Consider acquiring new and updating existing technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning. All staff interviewed noted the need for "improved technology." All staff interviewed also reported the need to update iPads with extra memory storage capability because they shut down during instruction, purchase Smart Boards for each classroom, and "explore a new online parent communication platform."

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Ensure that parents are set up in the student's record to have access to Connecticut Special Education Data System.

Move forth with the plan to make the program's outdoor wooded areas more useful for recreational purposes (e.g., hiking, nature walks, and expanding trails).

Move forth with the plan to create and purchase equipment for a sensory room.

Move forth with the plan to build a greenhouse to expand the program's horticulture (gardening and plant care) initiatives.

Familiarize program administration and professional staff (chief administrator, education directors, and instructional personnel) with the *Connecticut Guidelines for Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support 2023* for implementation beginning the 2024-25 school year. Training information can be accessed at [Talent Office \(ct.gov\)](https://talent.ct.gov).

Identify a paraeducator to participate on the program's Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) in accordance with Public Act 23-159, Section 11. The committee shall consist of (1) at least one teacher, (2) at least one administrator, (3) at least one paraeducator, and (4) such other school personnel as the board deems appropriate. Consider having the program's PDEC develop and circulate a survey to staff to align PD opportunities with specific topics of interest.

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.

Maintain the practice/process of carefully reviewing each student's IEP to ensure that the IEPs are accurate, complete, and able to be fully implemented.

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 Foundation School-Orange's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2029, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to The Foundation School-Orange:

<b>Approved Ages to Serve:</b>	3–18 years old
<b>Approved Grades to Serve:</b>	PK–12th
<b>Approved Enrollment Capacity:</b>	30 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2029

cc: Aksana Varapai, Education Director