



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Toni Giannone, Chief Administrator
The Speech Academy

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

DATE: March 26, 2025

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

On Thursday, October 24, 2024, an evaluation team visited The Speech Academy to conduct an on-site program reapproval review. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mary Edo, Director of Special Services, Orange Public Schools; and
- Dr. Lisa Riggi, Education Director, Aspire Living and Learning.

During a previous site visit on October 20, 2024, 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 October 24, 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:

The program has invested in technology to support teachers in their instruction and students in their learning including, but not limited to, laptop and desktop computers, iPads, Chromebooks, Kindles, Sony Camera, Smartboards in each classroom, FM Trainers, Meta Quest 2 and 3, Apple Vision Pro, and 3D Pens/3D printers. The program utilizes a variety of electronic curriculum

tools, including the Unique Learning System, IXL Personalized Learning Platform, Touchmath, Reading A to Z and Floreo. Academic skills levels are assessed using Gray's Oral Reading Test, WIAT IV, Brigance Comprehensive Test, and Unique Learning System/Reading A to Z.

The program has a unique "cross-generational" partnership with the local Senior Center where students engage in dance class, art class, trick or treating, Halloween and Memorial Day parades, cooking and baking in the center's commercial kitchen, ping pong, corn hole, sorting tasks, and envelope stuffing.

Students benefit from a variety of field trips and activities at several locations such as the Maritime Aquarium, Audubon Society, Silverman's Farm, Shop Rite (weekly grocery shopping), EMS and Fire Touch a Truck, marching in the Memorial Day Parade, Exotic Animal House, field day, recycling center, craft and auction fairs, and weekly physical education class at the community center.

The program's climate and culture as described by the observation team is friendly and positive. An excellent rapport between education staff and students was observed as evidenced through smiles, humor, and teachers providing students with specific positive praise.

The observation team reported evidence of well-planned instruction, which appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student. Implementation of accommodations and modifications were evidenced for students as identified in the individualized education programs (IEPs). Lesson content was aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards.

Standard Deficiencies:

The Speech Academy must rectify the following standard deficiencies.

Standard E: Individual Student Records - A private facility shall maintain a written record for each student, which shall include administrative, treatment, and educational data from the time of admission until the time the student leaves the facility. A student's individual record shall contain, but not limited to:

A student's individual record that shall contain, as a minimum, the following:

- a copy of the IEP proposed by the local education agency (LEA) prior to referral and at least annually thereafter, indicating current levels of performance, accommodations/modifications; specialized instruction, supports and services (as appropriate, a behavior intervention plan and a language and communication plan) developed by the planning and placement team (PPT) as required to provide a free appropriate public education;
- reports of student progress toward achieving the objectives in the IEP that are aligned with reporting dates as determined by the PPT and as indicated on the student's IEP;
- consent forms signed by the parent(s)/guardian(s) allowing the facility to authorize all prescribed medical treatment and include the consent forms when a private facility conducts routine screenings (i.e., hearing/vision or provides immunizations required by statute to students);
- **cumulative health records.**

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- evaluation records; and
- required documentation needed to inform required data collections (i.e., Teacher-Course Student data, membership and attendance data, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, incidents of the emergency use of restraint or seclusion, reports of injury [serious and non-serious] resulting from a restraint or seclusion, and reports of all other significant events that may require a PPT).

Issue: In one (1) of five (5) student files reviewed, health records were not current.

Corrective Action: On or before April 28, 2025, submit to the BSE an index or organizational format that will be consistently used for student files to ensure that all required components are contained in each student's education record. In addition, the format must allow easy access and reference for administrators, teachers, related service personnel, LEAs, parents, and others who may need access, to gain insight of the students served and ensure implementation of a student's individual program with fidelity.

On or before April 28, 2025, provide the BSE with the current health record(s) of the student file reviewed in which there was no evidence of a current health record.

Training, Professional Development, and Other Requirements:

Establish a Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) committee. For required committee member composition, refer to Public Act 23-159. [AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHERS AND PARAEDUCATORS](#). Staff interviewed shared they would like to have input in the selection of professional development (PD) activities. Consider having the PDEC committee develop an interest/need survey to distribute to all staff.

Consider expanding opportunities for outside PD resources—staff share an appreciation for diverse PD and training opportunities. Explore the menu of activities and events available through the Connecticut State Education Resource Center for teachers, paraeducators, and related service personnel. Ensure that paraeducators are provided with a minimum of 18 hours of PD per year at no cost in accordance with Connecticut Public Act 23-159. [AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHERS AND PARAEDUCATORS](#).

Expand upon the program's written plan for ongoing personnel PD that must contain: 1) the program, at no cost, provides a minimum of 18 hours of PD activities per school year (relevant to the services of the program) to its certified staff and paraeducators; and 2) documentation of each PD activity (e.g., an agenda, the name and qualifications of the presenter(s) and content, and the sign-in/sign-out lists of in-person activity participants/virtual participants. Include in each staff member's personnel file, the full listing of PD activities via a transcript that reflects all PD activities the program has provided and/or engaged in by staff.

Recommendations to Consider:

Develop procedures and protocols to increase the frequency of communication and collaboration with families. Two related service providers interviewed (physical therapist and speech language therapist) reported internal program communication and collaboration as a program strength. However, other interviewees shared that a suggested area of program improvement is to develop

procedures and protocols to increase the frequency of communication and collaboration with families. The observation team noted there is “little to no evidence of family engagement” based on the interviews conducted.

Contact your local Regional Education Service Center (RES-C) representatives for training and support for the Easton and Somersville program locations (Luke Forshaw, CES, RES-C contact for Easton: forshawl@cestrumbull.org and Dana Corriveau, CREC, RES-C contact for Somersville: dcorriveau@crec.org. Teachers interviewed expressed the need to learn about the new Connecticut Guidelines for Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support 2023.

Enhance the visual appeal and attractiveness of the learning environment (hallways and classrooms). The observation team shared that the environment is not well-maintained and needs maintenance (painting)—“aesthetic updating.” The program administrator shared that there is currently a contract in place for updating the building space in which the program is located.

Move forth with the plan to expand upon community-based partnerships to enable students to gain insight into potential careers of interest. The program currently has community-based partnerships to foster internship opportunities for students with IEP transition goals and objectives, which include the bank, town hall, the local library, and senior center internships.

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.

Please indicate in writing to the BSE whether your program agrees with the report and accepts the delineated corrective action plan no later than April 10, 2025. Based on this program review and the current systemic complaint investigation, a recommendation for the program’s one-year conditional approval through January 31, 2026, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to The Speech Academy.

Approved Ages Served:	5 through 22 years old
Approved Grades Served:	K through 12th
Approved Enrollment Capacity:	65 students (Easton)
Approval Expiration Date:	January 31, 2026

cc: Judith Walsh, Education Director