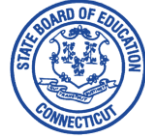




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Mr. William DeHaven, Chief Administrator
Villa Maria Education Center

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 30, 2023, an evaluation team visited Villa Maria Education Center (Villa Maria) to conduct a program reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dr. Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE/the Bureau);
- Dr. Jessica Sciarretto, Director of Student Services, Regional School District 15; and
- Mark Hedrick, Senior Director of Education, Oak Hill School.

During a previous site visit on March 28, 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 30, 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 leadership is highly collaborative, thoughtful, and supportive. Staff shared they are "very comfortable with going to administration." Staff expressed that they are "super appreciative that leadership seeks and values their input in the decision-making process." Additionally, staff reported they are "very happy working here," and is evident by employment longevity.

The beautiful campus houses excellent facilities appropriate for addressing the academic, social, emotional, and physical development needs of students. A secure, structured, nurturing environment supports and stimulates the development of the whole child. The program site is bright, spacious, clean, and organized. Classrooms are large and colorful with student work and art products displayed.

A description used during the visit was that the program has a culture/climate that is very accepting, warm, caring, and student-centered. Positive and respectful relationships between students and between staff and students were evident.

As described, collaboration is a program strength. The program has a school community meeting every morning in the meeting hall before school begins, which includes all staff and students.

Communication between teachers and family is consistent—a minimum of once per week. There is a half day each Friday dedicated to “staff teaming.” The program communicates school information and upcoming events through a “Weekly Villa Voice” email, which always includes various resources for parents and families.

The program provides student interaction opportunities daily through art, physical education, lunch, sports, and homework clubs.

The observation 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. Instructional materials and resources were very accessible.

Standard Deficiencies:

Villa Maria must rectify the following standard deficiencies:

Standard H: Positive Behavioral Supports, Prevention, and Intervention Strategies - Each private facility shall have written policies and procedures describing the positive behavioral supports and services as well as the prevention and intervention strategies employed by the program. Each private facility shall make provisions to train staff in positive behavioral supports and services as well as prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, the program will provide all staff the training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint and seclusion. The program will provide training to an identified crisis intervention team or all staff that meets the requirements of current legislation and/or regulations that addresses the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and includes, but not limited to, verbal defusing or de-escalation, prevention strategies, types of physical restraint, the differences between life-threatening physical restraint and other varying levels of physical restraint, the differences between permissible physical restraint and pain compliance techniques, monitoring to prevent harm to a person physically restrained or in seclusion, and recording and reporting procedures on the use of restraint and seclusion. The facility should ensure that staff executes such techniques with fidelity and due regard for fairness, humanity, and the dignity of the individual. Only those staff members trained in accordance with current statutes can engage in the emergency use of restraint or seclusion.

Issue: Villa Maria did not provide the education staff with the required annual training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint and seclusion. It was the education director’s intent to change from Physical Management Training to Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) de-escalation training. Due to unforeseen circumstances on the part of the education director, the transition was delayed. CPI certification for all four members of the

program's required crisis intervention team lapsed in 2020/2021. Of the four staff who comprise the crisis intervention team (as identified on the *Application for Approval of a Private Special Education Program* document item 18-C submitted with the application), only one staff member of the team (school nurse) received the required training on March 14, 2023.

Corrective Action: Although no restraint and seclusion incidents occurred during this time frame, the CSDE is requiring Villa Maria to provide staff with training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint and seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint/seclusion. On or before June 23, 2023, provide the BSE with a letter of attestation that Villa Maria will annually provide its staff with training related to the laws around the emergency use of physical restraint/seclusion and the required monitoring and reporting of restraint/seclusion. Additionally, provide the BSE with documentation annually (prior to the first day of school) evidencing that all staff have received the required annual training during the previous year and include the name, title/position, and date(s) of training.

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 (3) months.

Issue: In reviewing emergency drill records, Villa Maria 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 Villa Maria Education Center:

Move forth with the plan for the program's curriculum committee to focus on revising curriculum units of study in all content areas taught.

Maintain close communication and decision-making practices among administrators. Teachers and related service providers interviewed shared that at times they "receive mixed messages from the different administrators."

Contact the Connecticut State Department of Education Talent Office to arrange for the program's chief administrator to participate in the System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) training for administrators ([CSDE Evaluation Training](#)). The program's chief administrator is responsible for conducting the performance evaluation(s) of the program's education director. The program's chief administrator is to participate in the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) System of Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) training. In accordance with the *Principles, Procedures and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs, February 2021*.

Consider making a career interest inventory assessment instrument available to students designed to help them explore and identify careers that would be conducive to their specific interests.

Provide additional external professional development training activities/opportunities. Although interviewees expressed appreciation for the professional development and training activities that Villa Maria provides to internal staff, they shared that they would also value opportunities for external training activities. Provide teacher training in the use of Promethean Boards. Teachers interviewed reported a need to develop skills using the Promethean Boards as an extension to instruction—offering interactive, creative ways to present content to students.

Preliminary Evaluation Report: Villa Maria Education Center
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program
May 31, 2023

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.

Move forth with the plan to develop community-based partnerships to afford students with opportunities to engage in career exploration and vocational opportunities.

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 Villa Maria Education Center's written agreement and acceptance of the entire report, the Bureau will submit a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2026, to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Villa Maria Education Center:

Approved Ages to Serve:	5 through 16 years old
Approved Grades to Serve:	K through 9th
Approved Enrollment Capacity:	105 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2026

cc: Pauline Smith, Consulting Education Director