



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Laura Carroll
Chief Administrator
Hope Academy

FROM: ^{cmh} Colleen M. Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator
Bureau of Special Education
Approved Private Special Education Programs

DATE: May 25, 2018

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

On January 23, 2018, an evaluation team visited Hope Academy special education program in order to conduct an on-site review for continuous approval from the Connecticut State Department of Education. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Karen Helene, Director of Education, Benhaven School; and
- Suzanne Wright, Director of Special Education, North Branford Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on January 22, 2018, Ms. Hayles reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. In addition, Ms. Hayles has reviewed the application and its accompanying documents submitted to the BSE by Hope Academy administration.

At the exit conference on January 23, 2018, Ms. Hayles and the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The following areas of the special education program have been 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; and
- termination of enrollment.

1. **Commendations**

- Hope Academy has a well-staffed, appropriately articulated, and implemented educational program, which focuses on the provision of academic instruction within a strong and highly supportive therapeutic setting.
- Hope Academy provides instructional settings with ample staff. These settings allow the delivery of highly individualized and rigorous academic instruction that is aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards and the individualized education programs (IEPs) of students enrolled.
- Teachers were characterized as caring providers skilled in providing an intensive, trauma-informed educational experience where there is strong coordination among all staff and an obvious priority to accommodate and meet the needs of all students enrolled.
- Strong teacher student relationships were evident and contributed to a trusting and engaging learning environment in the classrooms observed.
- Professional development (PD) is driven by data-based decision making and capitalizes on both external expertise and internal strengths of individuals on staff.
- The program supports the implementation of Communities of Practice/Professional Learning.
- The program utilizes a “flex classroom,” affording students a structured setting to process, calm, or regroup with the support of a teacher and/or other staff as needed. This instructional option has positively contributed to the limited use of emergency interventions reported by the program.
- The program provides the services of two reading coaches who are trained in a variety of reading approaches/methodologies and provide tiered reading interventions.
- The program provides a strong foundation for students through the CORE-4 self-monitoring system. CORE-4 is designed to provide a universal system of positive behavior supports as well as a continuum of evidence-based supports/interventions in response to individual student needs. A “check-in/check-out” procedure is also in place to provide a mechanism for staff to assess the emotional status of students throughout their day. Additionally, a behavior response team is in place to address significant escalation of disruptive behavior.
- The program implements ClassDoJo—a web-based system designed to create a positive culture, give students a voice, share moments with parents, and increase overall parent engagement.

Administration, teaching, and related service staff were well-versed in the teacher evaluation process and recognized a connection between the PD opportunities provided by the program and the PD needs of the individual staff.

- Classroom observations illustrated positive and supportive teacher communication with students and demonstrated implementation of a relational model. Students were reported to be engaged in learning and responsive to teacher and paraprofessional supports.
- Classroom observations yielded evidence in the differentiation of instruction, available visual supports, and an overall depth of understanding in the individual needs of students.
- The director of education and clinical director hold office hours on Friday afternoons to provide support, consultation, and additional supervision to staff on an as needed basis.
- A review of staff files indicates the maintenance of an individual PD log for each member of Hope Academy staff.
- The overall environment is designed to be conducive to the variable needs of the students enrolled including the availability and location of therapeutic supports and a variety of lighting in each instructional setting.

2. Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard F: Program Requirements - A private facility shall have a written description for each student's IEP and include as appropriate, a behavior intervention plan (BIP); the student success plan; the language and communication plan; and transition goals and objectives that move the student toward college or career readiness including opportunities to work and interact in the community, and shall have a written curriculum, sufficient instructional materials, supplies, and equipment, in accordance with state requirements for educational programs for full implementation of the IEP.

Issue: In the IEPs reviewed, one or more required elements was not accurately reflected or the IEP document was not complete. Such errors and omissions do not allow the program to fully implement the IEP. The errors and omissions include the following:

- On page 1 of an IEP, staff of Hope Academy was not accurately or appropriately identified according to his/her role for attending the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting.
- The IEPs, specifically the Special Considerations described on page 10, did not clearly articulate the supports/services required to address the level or significance of student needs.
- Clarity related to the delivery of specific related services such as "counseling" or "speech/language" was not provided on page 11. For example, "counseling" was identified as required for one hour per week and was noted as being provided in a 1:1/small group setting or in some cases "flexible depending on student need." Implementation of such services as articulated leaves service delivery undefined and open to interpretation.
- In two of the five IEPs reviewed, hours of time with non-disabled peers were indicated on page 11.

- Where a BIP was indicated in an IEP on page 10 and a document was attached to the IEP, the document lacked an appropriate title identifying it as a “behavior intervention plan,” which was informed by a functional behavior assessment.

Corrective Actions Required: Develop and document a process to review IEPs developed by the local education agency (LEA) to ensure that the IEPs accurately reflect the consensus of the PPT, are complete and accurate, reflect the current level/intensity of the student’s needs, and are able to be implemented by the program as written. Additionally, where there exists a discrepancy, provide documentation that the program has appropriately notified the LEA of the necessary changes or additions. On or before October 15, 2018, submit to the BSE a copy of the process/procedure developed to review IEPs and provide copies of the next three IEPs developed by the district’s PPT where the review process has been implemented and appropriate district notification, if needed, has been provided.

3. Recommendations:

It is recommended that your program consider taking the following action:

- Consider hiring a math coach to address student need, using a model similar to the one in place for the individual currently employed by the program to provide reading support.
- Include *all* “incident reports” (to include, but not limited to, reports of emergency use of restraint or seclusion) in the student file and develop a consistent mechanism for communicating the information of *all* incidents to the responsible LEA as well as the parent.
- Continue to explore and implement strategies to assist in the recruitment and maintenance of qualified staff. This may be achieved through activities such as outreach to college teacher preparation programs, the provision of additional incentives, and a review of salaries and benefits.
- Consider the recruitment of qualified content area teachers who may collaborate or co-teach in an effort to maintain academic rigor.

Within 15 working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether Hope Academy agrees with the report and whether the program accepts the delineated corrective action plan, if applicable. Upon receipt of Hope Academy’s acceptance of the report in its entirety, a recommendation for continuous approval through June 30, 2023, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to the special education program:

Approved Ages to Serve: 9–21 years old

Approved Student Capacity: 75

cc: Sarah Wilcox, Director of Education
Allison Lesko, Director of Education