




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Scott Wells, Chief Administrator
Options Educational Services

FROM: Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant 
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: June 5, 2019

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

On May 7, 2019, an evaluation team visited the special education program Options Educational Services (Options) to conduct an on-site review for reapproval. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Maureen Wood, Director of Education, Grace Webb School; and
- Joshua Robinson, Director of Special Services, Windsor Locks Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on April 30, 2019, Dori Papa reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Options administration.

At the exit conference on May 7, 2019, 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.

Commendations:

- The students enrolled benefit from a variety of highly individualized enrichment and vocational opportunities that are interest driven, community based, involve service learning, and provide a less restrictive community setting to practice learned social skills.
- The program has developed numerous community partnerships with work sites to provide students with vocational job site experience. The program is eager to develop new community partnerships to build upon individual student career interest opportunities.

- There are multiple learning areas within classrooms including independent work stations, a computer area, and a comfortable area for quiet reading.
- Classroom observations confirmed the implementation of highly individualized academic instruction and access to necessary accommodations.
- The overall climate and culture of the program is warm, positive, and reinforcing. There is a culture of respect between staff and students.
- The program has a full-time school counselor who is readily available to provide social and emotional support for students, as well as frequent and effective communication with parents. Additionally, all students have daily standard check-in times with the school counselor.
- An annual compilation of the professional development (PD) activities in which each staff member has participated, is well documented and available in each staff file reviewed.
- The program has a PD committee comprised of administration, teachers, and related service providers that collaborates to plan diverse PD and training activities aligned with the annual System for Educator Evaluation Development results, Connecticut Core Standards, and individual staff interests. Staff interviewed reported that PD is a collaborative process and not “administration driven.”
- The teacher interview responses evidenced a solid understanding of the individualized education program (IEP) process and illustrated effective collaboration with each student’s local education agency. Teachers, paraeducators, school counselor, and related service providers collaborate to monitor IEP goals and objectives on a quarterly basis.
- The observation team shared that the demeanor of teachers, teacher assistants, and all other staff members was “impeccable, kind, low key, and all staff exhibited excellent interaction with students.”
- The teachers interviewed reported that administration is very supportive, provides timely and positive feedback, hands-on/knows the students very well, and integrally involved in the individualized educational and vocational programming for all students. In particular, staff interviewed also reported that the director of education was exceptionally organized and involved.
- The program provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff are committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students. Routines, procedures, and behavioral expectations are clear.
- Program service providers (professional counselor and speech/language pathologist) are invested in the program as they attend all school activities, and make themselves available for students who are struggling even on their unscheduled work days.
- The program has a large vocational classroom that is well-equipped to enable opportunities for students to engage in career exploration activities through the use of current technology, including the online career and life skills resource “COPS, CAPS, and COPES.”

- The program site is welcoming, spacious, organized, comfortable, and well-kept. The facility includes an exercise room (used for physical education and de-escalation), a spacious kitchen, and vocational exploration for hands-on bicycle repair opportunities.
- Students develop independence while enrolled in the program and have opportunities to take college level, credit bearing courses at Manchester Community College.

Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel -

The private facility shall require that prior work references be on record for all applicants and that the applicant submit to a Department of Children and Families Child Abuse and Neglect Registry records check, before hiring staff who will work directly with students. The private facility shall obtain the information from ALL current or former employer(s) of the applicant as listed on the State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form if such employer was a local or regional board of education, an approved private special education program, a governing council of a state or local charter school, an interdistrict magnet school operator, or if the employment caused the applicant to have contact with children.

State and national criminal history records check (fingerprinting of staff who work directly with students), shall be submitted within 30 days of hire and on file within 60 days from the date of employment (Connecticut General Statutes [CGS] Section 10-221d).

Issue: There was no evidence that a State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form was completed for an employee hired after July 1, 2016.

Corrective Action: Provide an attestation to BSE that the State of Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form will be obtained for each new employee and that upon obtaining completed forms, the program's chief administrator or director of education will make appropriate contact with previous or current employers.

Issue: In two of five personnel files reviewed, fingerprinting checks were not submitted within 30 days of hire.

Corrective Action: Provide an attestation to the BSE that the Connecticut and national criminal history records checks (fingerprinting for staff who work directly with students) shall be submitted within 30 days of hire in accordance with CGS Section 10-22d.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered to Options:

- Maintain the process of reviewing IEPs for appropriateness and accuracy. For example, ensure that related services provided on an individual and small group are broken out/separated.
- Continue to expand resources, tools, and skills of staff to enhance instruction through the use of technology such as through the use of Smart Boards. For example, consider the use of a Smart Board in the planning and placement team (PPT) conference room to allow students to share their academic and vocational achievements, experiences, projects, and other highlights during his or her PPT meeting(s).

- Continue opportunities for students to participate together in small group academic instruction, extracurricular, and various schoolwide activities.
- Increase the planning and collaboration time between teachers, teacher assistants, related service providers, and behavior analysts. Ensure that part-time education staff are involved in team collaboration.

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. Please be advised that a recommendation for continuous approval through June 30, 2024, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education once written acceptance of the report in its entirety is received.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Options:

Approved Ages:	Ages 11–21 years old
Approved Grades:	5–12
Approved Student Capacity:	22
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2024

cc: Linda Carlson, Director of Education
Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator