




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Dawn Matera, Ed.D.  
Mark Beitel, Ph.D.  
Chief Administrators  
Westport Day School

**FROM:** Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator   
Bureau of Special Education  
Approved Private Special Education Programs

**DATE:** November 8, 2018

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

On November 1, 2018, an evaluation team visited Westport Day School in order to conduct an on-site review for continuous approval as a Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Approved Private Special Education Program (APSEP). The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education;
- Patrick Tudryn, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, East Windsor Public Schools; and
- Barbara Feldman, Director of Education, Woodhouse Academy.

During a previous visit on October 25, 2018, Colleen Hayles from the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. In addition, Ms. Hayles has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Westport Day School administration.

At the exit conference on October 25, 2018, 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:**

- Westport Day School provides highly individualized programming characterized as a therapeutic educational milieu specifically designed to afford students with a small, supported, and safe learning environment. Attention to the use of space, lighting, color scheme, sound, and air quality for students contributes to the overall learning environment.
- The program addresses the needs of a very specific group of students who may experience a high degree of anxiety and/or depression and/or demonstrate other internalizing behaviors, which have an impact on their ability to access and benefit from the challenges of a typical academic setting. A high degree of scrutiny applied to each referral ensures that the individual needs of each student can be addressed within the program as outlined in the IEP.
- The average placement period for students ranges from 12–24 months. Westport Day School staff work in close collaboration with local education agencies (LEAs), parents, and students, to ensure positive transitions to less restrictive educational settings. The goal of the program is to improve the academic and emotional well-being of each student with the goal of returning to his/her home district.
- Small class sizes of four to six students (not to exceed 10) promote individualization of instruction as well as emotional well-being and provides close monitoring of each student's emotional status.
- Daily “de-briefs” with staff foster collaboration and consistency in addressing each student's emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.
- The administration and staff are committed to the ongoing development of data collection systems to inform data-driven academic instruction and to measure the efficacy of such instruction as well as a means to measure social/emotional growth of each student.
- The staff demonstrates a strong commitment to the well-being of each student. Staff views administration as highly supportive and equally committed to implementing individual programs at the highest level of benefit to each student.
- The program is staffed with an appropriate mix of content area general education teachers and special education teachers and is a combination necessary to address the academic levels of students enrolled.
- The program provides opportunities for families to engage in monthly off-campus community building activities sponsored by Westport Day School (i.e., Yale campus walking tour, museum visits, and apple picking).
- Students benefit from yoga and mindfulness instruction within their day.
- Documentation provided, illustrates effective implementation of the Educator Evaluation System, an outline of a comprehensive and relevant plan for professional development (PD) and a specific framework for reporting a student's progress towards achievement of individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives.

**Standard Deficiencies:**

**Standard D: Administration** - A private facility shall have a written policy to assure that it complies with the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Public Law 108-446; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 United States Code, Section 1232g; 34 Code of Federal Regulations Part 99, Sections 10-76a to 1076q, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS), and the regulations adopted thereunder; Public Act (PA) 96-246 (reporting of child abuse); PA 11-232 - An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws; PA 12-88 - An Act Concerning the Reporting of Children Placed in Seclusion; and all other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and local requirements.

**Issue:** A review of the personnel files indicated that the required Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form for recent hires was not completed and was not requested from ALL applicable current or former employers as required. As required by CGS Section 10-222c, as amended by PA 16-67, each APSEP is required to obtain the information listed on the Educational Employer Verification form from ALL current or former employer(s) of the applicant if such employer was a local or regional board of education, 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. Applicants are required under the law to provide a prospective employer with the name, address, and telephone number of all current or former employers that meet the above criteria. Information may be collected either through a written communication or telephonically.

**Corrective Action Required:** On or before June 30, 2018, submit to the BSE copies of the completed Connecticut Educational Employer Verification form for each new hire and/or submit an attestation that the form will be utilized with ALL applicable current or former employers and is part of the staff file.

**Standard F: Program Requirements** - The local school district is responsible for the development and appropriateness of a student's IEP and any changes made in that IEP. Each private facility shall request an IEP from the placing LEA prior to enrollment of the student in the private facility. The IEP shall serve as the basis for instruction for each student. The IEP presented by the LEA serves as the basis for admission and should identify the current performance levels of the student, the appropriate specialized instruction, and required related services. Prior to placement of a student in an APSEP, each private facility should participate in the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting, which discusses and determines placement.

**Issue:** In the IEPs reviewed, one or more required elements of the IEP was not accurately reflected or the IEP document was not complete, therefore, prohibiting the program from fully implementing the IEP. Errors and omissions included the following:

- staff of Westport Day School was not accurately or appropriately identified according to their roles as attending the PPT on page 1 of the IEP;
- the IEPs, specifically the Special Considerations section described on page 10, did not clearly articulate the supports/services required to address the level or significance of students' needs; and
- one IEP did not reflect a complete Present Levels of Performance section and did not identify areas of concern or an impact statement, which would inform the development of appropriate goals/objectives.

**Corrective Action Required:** Carefully review the IEPs submitted to Westport Day School from referral LEAs to ensure that the goals and objectives as well as required supports and related services are available prior to considering enrollment and scheduling an admission tour/meeting. A representative from Westport Day School must attend a PPT meeting initiated by the LEA prior to the student enrolling in the program. Any necessary adjustment to the IEP must be discussed, agreed upon, and documented in the IEP that Westport Day School will implement. On or before January 15, 2018, submit to the BSE an attestation indicating revision to the application process, permitting review of the IEP to determine full implementation, prior to scheduling an admissions visit for the student referred. Also, submit a description of the procedure/process implemented to review the IEP upon referral.

**Recommendations:**

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

- Increase opportunities for both students and staff to benefit from greater access to technology; utilizing online learning as appropriate. This is essential given the academic/cognitive strengths of students enrolled and would further support preparation for postsecondary education and employment.
- Expand elective offerings such as foreign languages and music.
- Establish a “common area” for students to enhance opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration and the development of social skills.
- Create an annual summary of PD activities for each staff member to become part of his/her personnel file. The PD offered appears comprehensive. Additionally, assure that the annual educator evaluation summary is part of each staff member’s file.
- Add a part-time or full-time position to address all aspects of transition, the development of community connections, and activities promoting readiness for college and career. This position could also support students and act as a substitute in the absence of a teacher.

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, if applicable. Upon receipt of Westport Day School’s written acceptance of this report in its entirety, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2023, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to Westport Day School:

<b>Ages/Grades Approved to Serve:</b>	10–21 years old/Grades 6 <sup>th</sup> –12 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Approved Capacity:</b>	50 students
<b>Approval Expiration Date:</b>	June 30, 2023

cc: Catherine Cunningham