



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Helen Burland  
Chief Administrator  
Saint Catherine Academy

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

**DATE:** May 17, 2018

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

On February 28, 2018, an evaluation team visited the Saint Catherine Academy (Saint Catherine) 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);
- Mike Nicolson, Director of Education, The Foundation Schools;
- Carleen Wood, Supervisor of Special Education, Greenwich Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on February 23, 2018, Ms. Colleen Hayles of the BSE reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. In addition, she has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Saint Catherine administration.

At the exit conference on February 28, 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.

1. **Commendations:**

- Saint Catherine Academy intentionally maintains small class sizes to ensure the implementation of individualized, unique, and student specific programs, addressing goals and objectives both within the classroom and in the community.
- The intimacy of the program promotes a high level of collaboration between education staff and providers of related services, fostering the ability of students to generalize new learning across settings.
- The overall climate and culture of the program is positive and reinforcing. Staff are committed to the mission of the school and have the support of an involved Board of Directors.
- The facility provides excellent expanded instructional spaces, which are intentional in their design, well maintained, and provide designated areas for related services, the arts, and physical education. A Department of Developmental Services adult services program is also located in the building. Shared spaces and other collaborative activities between the two programs has been of benefit to staff, students, and parents of students who attend Saint Catherine.
- A model apartment is available within the school that provides an ideal, real-life setting to assist students in developing independent living skills and promotes individual student readiness for transition to postsecondary experiences and independent living.
- Students contribute to their community through volunteer programs such as food prep for a nearby homeless shelter.
- Access to a full-time nurse, a full-time vocational coordinator, and increased services from a full-time social worker enhances the services to students enrolled.
- The program's admission policy includes (whenever possible) a visit to a student's current school/program when considering a referral and prior to accepting a student.
- High-tech instructional devices such as iPads and other equipment are available to students and teachers and are integrated with other low-tech strategies to address the diverse needs of the students enrolled.
- Students have access to a variety vocational training activities in school and in the community.
- Saint Catherine students and staff benefit from the program's collaboration with nearby colleges/universities and other diocesan schools in the area.

2. **Standard Deficiencies:**

**Standard F: Program Requirements** - A private facility shall have a written description of the individualized education program (IEP) for each student that should include as appropriate, a behavior intervention plan (BIP); the student success plan; the language and communication plan; and as appropriate, 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 and 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 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 Saint Catherine was not accurately or appropriately identified according to their roles as attending the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting on page one of the IEP.
- Clarity related to the delivery of specific related services such as “speech/language” was not provided on page 11. For example, “speech/language” was identified as required for one hour per week and was noted as being provided in a 1:1 /small group setting or in one case, “flexible depending on student need.” Implementation of such services as articulated leaves service delivery undefined and open to interpretation.
- In one of the five IEPs reviewed, hours of time with non-disabled peers were indicated on page 11.
- Where a unilateral placement was terminated and a district placement was initiated, it was not clearly documented in these situations whether a PPT was held at which a representative from Saint Catherine was in attendance prior to placement. It was also not clearly documented whether an IEP was reviewed or developed by the district.
- In two of five IEPs reviewed, it was indicated that the student required a BIP on page 10. However, there was no current BIP or functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to inform the BIP, attached to the IEP.

**Corrective Action Required:** Develop and document a process to review IEPs developed by the PPT to ensure that 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 local education agency of the necessary changes or additions. On or before July 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 by Saint Catherine and appropriate district notification, if needed, has been provided.

### **3. Recommendations:**

- Maintain engagement in the Professional Development and Evaluation Committee to ensure feedback regarding the implementation of the educator evaluation process and to make any necessary changes to the plan.
- Consider increasing the social worker position to a full-time position to focus on increasing opportunities for time with non-disabled peers, foster the self-advocacy skills of the students enrolled, and enhance parent/family involvement.
- Continue and expand the successful efforts to pursue grants to provide the students enrolled with access to a variety of activities based on student interests and needs.
- Consider adding a Connecticut certified art teacher to the professional staff.
- Utilize page 10 of the IEP to better articulate the individual needs of students in relation to what is needed to address the behaviors that may impact their access to learning. Consider the following questions:
  1. Is there a schoolwide system of positive behavioral supports in place to address student need?

2. Is the implementation of social emotional goals/objectives sufficient to address the individual needs of the student or does the student require a specific intervention or set of interventions to address behaviors of concern or teach new alternative behaviors through a BIP? If so, is the BIP informed by an FBA?
- Expand opportunities for students to apply social skills instruction in various settings.
  - 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 to 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 transition.

Within 15 working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether Saint Catherine agrees with the report and accepts the delineated corrective action plan, if applicable. Upon receipt of Saint Catherine'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:** 5–21 years old

**Approved Student Capacity:** 28

cc: Brian Farrell, Director of Education