



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Alisa Dror
Chief Administrator
The Pinnacle School

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

DATE: April 27, 2018

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

On March 27, 2018, an evaluation team visited The Pinnacle School (Pinnacle) in order to conduct an on-site review of the special education program for continuous approval from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Brooke Violante, Chief Administrator, High Road Schools; and
- Carolyn Borcharding, Supervisor of Special Education, Greenwich Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on March 19, 2018, Ms. Hayles reviewed the education files of five students as well as personnel files. She has also reviewed the application and its accompanying documents submitted to the BSE by Pinnacle administration.

At the exit conference on March 27, 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:

- The Pinnacle School provides a high teacher to student ratio, which promotes highly differentiated classroom instruction.
- Small class sizes promote student engagement, individualized academic support as well as social, emotional, and behavioral support to students in real time.
- The location of the common area, classrooms, and the support personnel offices provides a community atmosphere where staff and students can easily collaborate and find support in real time.
- The school provides a safe, intimate learning environment in which all staff are committed to high academic and behavioral expectations for students. A focus on collaborative problem solving and relationship building are the foundation of successful outcomes for students.
- An overall 1:1 ratio of students to staff affords opportunities for “in the moment” coaching to support students’ social, emotional, and behavioral health.
- Pinnacle has expanded the availability and access to technology. Students benefit from individual chrome books, availability of smart boards, and the use of a 3-D printer.
- Pinnacle employs an array of staff including special education and subject area teachers; three school psychologists; three speech and language pathologists, 1 full time and 1 part time occupational therapist; a board certified behavior analyst and behavioral staff; a college and career counselor; and a team of paraprofessionals to support the various academic, social, and emotional needs of students enrolled.
- Students enrolled can benefit from a variety of enrichment opportunities that are interest driven, community based, involve service learning, and provide a less restrictive community setting to practice learned social skills.
- Pinnacle affords teachers and related service personnel with a yearly stipend to utilize in accessing off-site professional development (PD) activities.

2. Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel - All special education program administrators, instructional, and related services personnel providing special education and related services who were hired after September 1, 1980, shall hold proper state certification that shall be on file with the CSDE.

Issue: The certification status of two educators or related service providers remains either under review or cannot be determined at this time. The program has been provided with the names of the staff who do not currently hold a valid Connecticut certification.

Corrective Action Required: On or before June 30, 2018, submit current certification for ALL identified personnel. Failure to meet this standard on or before June 30, 2018, may result in a change in approval status from “approved” to “conditional approval.” A conditional approval is limited to one year and requires that the program take actions specified in the *Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*.

Standard F: Program Requirements - A private facility shall have a written description of the individualized education program (IEP) for each student, which 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, prohibiting the program from fully implementing the IEP. Errors and omissions included the following:

- On page 1 of the IEP, staff of Pinnacle was not accurately or appropriately identified according to their roles as attending the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting.
- 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. Implementation of such services as articulated leaves service delivery undefined and open to interpretation. Flexible scheduling was also used to describe the setting for the implementation of occupational therapy goals and objectives.
- In two of the five IEPs reviewed, time with non-disabled peers was indicated on page 11.
- In one of five IEPs, it was not clearly documented that a PPT meeting was held at which a representative from Pinnacle was in attendance prior to placement and that an IEP was reviewed or developed by the district.
- In one of five IEPs reviewed, a most recent IEP indicated that placement at Pinnacle was “refused” by the district and service delivery indicates implementation of specific related services within the general education setting.
- While IEPs and progress reports were evident in the student file, there was no documentation indicating that progress reports were forwarded to parents or sending districts according to the schedule identified on the IEP.
- Page 10 of the IEP does not adequately articulate the level of need for students and the strategies, interventions, and behavioral supports needed to address behaviors that are impeding their learning. Necessary schoolwide supports, services, and strategies appropriate to the student’s need and if determined necessary, individual BIPs based on the conduct of a functional behavior assessment (FBA), are not indicated on page 10 of the IEP.

Corrective Action Required: Develop and document a process to review IEPs developed by the PPT to ensure that they 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 June 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 Pinnacle and appropriate district notification, if needed, has been provided.

Standard I: Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel - A private facility shall have established procedures for supervising and evaluating the performance of all staff members according to their job descriptions and shall align with the Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation, which outlines the standards to which all educator evaluation plans in Connecticut must adhere.

Issue: A review of staff files revealed limited documentation of observation feedback and overall annual rating based on the evaluation rubric identified in the educator evaluation plan submitted to the CSDE Talent Office.

Corrective Action: Ensure that the documentation/feedback resulting from formal observations and the final annual rating for each teacher is available in the each staff file.

On or before July 15, 2018, submit to the BSE documentation of written feedback provided to staff regarding formal observations and the overall annual rating of two educators, which have been included in their file.

3. **Recommendations:**

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

- Continue to pursue alternative facilities to promote the availability of larger instructional settings (classrooms) and additional treatment and office space as well as outdoor space appropriate to the students served. The current location impacts the development of a truly separate program identity, climate, and culture relative to Pinnacle.
- Maintain the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council to assist in reviewing and implementing with fidelity, the plan that was submitted and to assist with making the appropriate requests for revision of the plan.
- Establish PD activities, which address the educator evaluation process and afford staff the opportunity to receive written feedback of formal observations and as appropriate informal observations.
- Continue to explore PD and other resources and tools to establish an improved system to collect and utilize progress monitoring data.

- The program indicated that a process is underway to hire a curriculum coordinator at Pinnacle. The addition of this position will strengthen the recognition and understanding of the demands felt by educators within a therapeutic program. Focus should be placed on addressing time management issues identified by staff, training staff to create draft goals and objectives that are measurable, and the consideration of additional opportunities for planned collaboration among staff.
- Ensure that fingerprinting for criminal background checks and employment verification forms are completed in a timely manner and included in the file of each Pinnacle staff member upon hiring.
- Increase the number of chrome books available within each classroom.
- Ensure that when individualized behavior interventions are required to address a student's behavior for which a BIP is developed, the BIP is informed by a current FBA.

Within 15 working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether Pinnacle agrees with the report and whether the program accepts the delineated corrective action plan, if applicable. Upon receipt of Pinnacle'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:

Ages Approved to Serve: 7–21 years old

Approved Student Capacity: 45

cc: Charles Manos, Director of Education
Peter Newman, Chief Executive Officer