




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Michelle Lestrud, Chief Administrator/Director of Education
Gengras Center

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

DATE: May 20, 2019

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

On March 12, 2019, an evaluation team visited Gengras Center (Gengras) special education program in order to conduct an on-site review for continuous approval as a Connecticut State Department of Education approved private special education program. The team consisted of:

- Colleen Hayles, Education Consultant/Coordinator, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Mary Gunsalus, Director of Education, Yale Child Study Center School; and
- Kay Moser, Director of Special Education, Monroe Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on March 5, 2019, Colleen Hayles reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Ms. Hayles reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by Gengras Center administration.

At the exit conference on March 12, 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 staff at Gengras is best characterized as skilled, passionate, engaging, and professional. The climate and culture of the school is positive and supportive. A unique level of collaboration and community is evident throughout. Staff turnover is limited and in many cases when staff do leave they return.

- The unique and often significant needs of the students served, require a high level of adult support and instruction, which is highly individualized and in some situations require 1:1 support from specialized providers such as licensed practical nurses (LPNs).
- The teachers demonstrate skill in adapting and individualizing instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students while addressing state standards. The skill level of the teachers in managing and directing the responsibilities of up to 10 teacher assistants (TAs) within their classrooms is notable. In classrooms observed, the instructional process was smooth and seamless. TAs were well prepared to execute their responsibilities with individual students. They demonstrated an ability to individually support the student while promoting engagement among students and fostered social opportunities.
- TAs assigned to individual students accompany them to related service sessions optimizing opportunities to implement specific strategies, accommodations, and expectations within, and across, all settings.
- Implementation of both low- and high-tech accommodations are utilized to address the unique needs of the individual student.
- The program supports an in-house Crisis Prevention Institute trainer as well as coaches, to provide initial training and refresher trainings focused on de-escalation and crisis intervention. Trainer/coaches also conduct debriefing sessions with staff to review procedures.
- The program benefits from the unique opportunities afforded by their location and affiliation with the University of Saint Joseph.
- Gengras conducts regular parent information sessions that address a variety of topics including, but not limited to, transition, communication, outside agency services, and other resources to support students and their families.
- Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) reviewed indicate that the goals and objectives proposed by Gengras staff for consideration by the planning and placement team (PPT), are well articulated and measurable and aligned with the Standards set forth in the *Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs*.
- Longevity of the professional staff at Gengras is positively impacted by the support provided by the administration, the collaboration among staff, and supervision available at all levels.
- A variety of volunteer and work experiences within the school, the University of Saint Joseph campus, and the community, are available for students based on their readiness and individual needs.
- The addition of the Center for Applied Research and Education building provides offices, a gymnasium, and classroom space that is well designed to meet the physical and environmental needs of students and accommodate the necessary staff and equipment.

- The student file review revealed appropriate documentation of functional behavior assessments and individual behavior intervention plans, as well as evidence that plans are reviewed on a regular basis and revised as needed.
- A part-time nutrition coordinator/registered dietician plans food and nutrition programs, consults with staff, and supports parents in promoting good nutrition and healthy eating habits.

Standard Deficiencies:

The following standard deficiencies must be rectified:

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 local education agency (LEA) prior to the enrollment of a 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. Each private facility should participate in the PPT that discusses and determines placement in the facility prior to placement.

Issue: In the IEPs reviewed, one or more required elements 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:

- In four of six IEPs reviewed, related services indicated on the IEP were not separated/broken out to specify if the delivery of service is provided on a 1:1, small group basis, or other means.
- There are currently six or seven students whose medical needs require 1:1 support of an LPN throughout their day. The IEP of at least one such student was reviewed. The grid outlining the IEP services did not reflect the need for such skilled personnel to assist in the implementation of the IEP under the direction of the classroom teacher and nurse supervisor.
- The 1:1 TAs accompany and support students and assist in addressing goals and objectives developed and implemented by related service personnel. However, TAs are not identified on the IEP as part of the team who assists in implementing related services.

Corrective Action: While the program has initiated a process and procedure for the review of an IEP received from the LEA and has identified in writing the need to make corrections, there remains a need for further scrutiny of the IEP document. Submit to BSE copies of the next three IEPs developed by the LEA's PPT for students enrolled. Demonstrate careful review for accuracy and completeness, and if needed, illustrate the implementation of written notification to the district to request necessary changes.

Recommendations:

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

- Remove the document referencing to the use of "Physical Restraint, Seclusion, and Suspension" from the policies outlining the behavior interventions implemented within the program. The use of restraint and seclusion is prohibited as a planned behavior intervention with the single exception of situations that meet the criteria of an "emergency."
- Review the current format utilized to report student progress towards achieving goals and objectives in the IEP with the goal of streamlining the process and the document.

- Explore the need for additional social work services to support students, families, and staff.
- Explore increased opportunities for staff to access kitchen facilities to enable teachers to more easily address independent living skills and provide blended and integrated instruction.
- Increase opportunities for teachers to conduct peer-to-peer observations within the Gengras program, as well as observations in other facilities (public and private) as a means of broadening teacher perspective and providing a unique professional development experience.

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 Gengras:

Approved Ages:	3–21 years old
Approved Grades:	PreK–12
Approved Capacity:	150 students
Approval Expiration Date:	June 30, 2024

cc: Paul LoVoi, Associate Director
Lynn Ford, Associate Director
Sean Tottenham, Associate Director