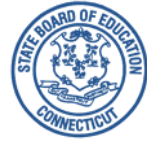




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Diane McManus  
Chief Administrator  
Villa Maria Education Center

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

**DATE:** April 12, 2018

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

On March 15, 2018, an evaluation team visited the Villa Maria Education Center (Villa Maria) 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);
- Charles Manos, Director of Education, The Pinnacle School; and
- Yvette Goorevitch, Director of Special Education, Norwalk Public Schools.

During a previous on-site visit on March 9, 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 Villa Maria administration.

At the exit conference on March 15, 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 overall climate and culture of Villa Maria is positive and reinforcing. Staff are characterized as warm and caring and focused on developing positive relationships with students.
- The school facility provides an inviting, engaging, and nurturing learning environment for students. Classrooms appear to be well equipped, providing strong visual supports to lessons as well as visual supports to behavior expectations.
- Implementation of principles of positive behavior interventions and supports are evident through visual rules and routines posted throughout the school.
- Villa Maria implements an eclectic approach to instruction—addressing the needs and individual goals of the whole child.
- Workspaces are well equipped to meet the requirements of the subjects taught and provide current technology opportunities to meet student’s needs.
- Class sizes are small (1:5), which optimize opportunities for differentiated instruction within grade levels.
- 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.
- Villa Maria has invested in technology that supports teachers in their instruction and students in their learning.
- The provision of related services are tailored to the needs of individual students and are provided through both a “pull-out” and “push-in” delivery model.
- Staff works effectively with students and their families. Staff availability to parents is enhanced by other programmatic policies and procedures that include an open door policy, daily homework communication, and weekly communication logs.

### **2. Standard Deficiencies:**

**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 and shall be on file with the CSDE.

**Issue:** The certification status of a total of four educators or related service providers remain either under review or cannot be determined at this time—due to the fact that appropriate steps have not been taken by the individual candidates to pursue acquisition of certification in Connecticut. The program has been provided with the names of the staff who are not currently certified in Connecticut.

**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.” 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 to fully implement 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 Villa Maria was not accurately or appropriately identified according to their roles as attending the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting on page 1 of the IEP. The director of education for the approved private special education program cannot be identified as the administrator responsible for district determinations.
- 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.
- In two of the five IEPs reviewed, hours of time with non-disabled peers were indicated on page 11.
- In one of five IEPs, it was not clearly documented that a PPT meeting was held prior to placement at which a representative from Villa Maria was in attendance and an IEP was reviewed or developed by the district.
- In one of five IEPs reviewed, page 11 was not complete, specifically items 13a and 13b.
- In one of five IEPs reviewed “co-treatment by the school psychologist and speech and language pathologist” was identified and Villa Maria does not employ a school psychologist; and
- Where BIPs have been developed based on the conduct of a functional behavior assessment, BIPs were not necessarily indicated on page 10 of the IEP and included as an attachment 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 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 Villa Maria and appropriate district notification, if needed, has been provided.

### **3. Recommendations:**

- Continue staff development around implementation of Common Core State Standards.
- Provide opportunities to advance PD activities that target evidence-based instructional strategies and methodologies as well as the behavioral needs of students enrolled.
- Continue to explore opportunities and methods of measuring student social emotional growth through data collection.
- Continue to provide PD opportunities to staff specific to Autism Spectrum Disorders to address the needs of the changing population, which appears to reflect students on the spectrum and those with interfering behaviors.

- Engage in providing training for additional staff in the area of specialized reading instruction and methodologies (i.e., Lindamood-Bell processes, Orton-Gillingham strategies and Wilson Reading).
- Consider developing a Villa Maria Progress Report Calendar to be proposed at placement PPTs in order to provide internal consistency in reporting student progress.
- Encourage staff to explore PD through observation and visitation of district classrooms and programs to enhance academic rigor and further develop progress monitoring tools.
- Consider expanding Villa Maria staff to include a school psychologist and/or a full-time behaviorist to assist in providing support to students and/or consultation to staff related to the behavioral needs of the population being served.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the accommodations afforded each student as outlined on page 8 of the IEP. If specific strategies or accommodations are no longer appropriate or additional accommodations are needed, recommend to the PPT that the IEP be updated.

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

**Ages Approved to Serve:** ages 5 through 16 years  
**Approved Student Capacity:** 105 students

cc: Eileen Cassidy, Director of Education  
Carol Ann Nawracaj, Director of Mission Advancement