



Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the report distributed by the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) and Disability Rights Connecticut (DRCT). High Road Schools of Connecticut would like to acknowledge both agencies, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and our district partners, as key advocates for students with the greatest need and who require more intense support during their educational experience.

The mission of High Road Schools has been to serve students with a broad range of needs by providing support, education, and the tools they need to achieve success and enjoy rewarding futures. High Road Schools are designed to serve students with academic, behavioral, and emotional disabilities in a non-clinical setting. Our behavioral supports and curricula are developed, reviewed, and enhanced by the nation's leading and respected experts in K-12 specialized education, Drs. Diane Myers and Ellen Gaske¹. We also routinely work with many internal and external experts that visit our schools, review student data, and provide insights into enhancing our programs.

As a respected partner to more than 45 LEAs across the state of Connecticut, High Road Schools understands the increased responsibility that comes with the services we provide. We are a mission-driven organization that continuously seeks ways to enhance our processes and performance to best serve our student population. While we have concerns about the manner in which this investigation was conducted and challenge many of the findings in the resulting report, certain observations during the investigation process were constructive. We swiftly implemented changes in response to the feedback and shared those updates and their outcomes with OCA and DRCT.

In fact, this spirit of continuous improvement in how we serve students and operate our schools has allowed us to implement many innovative processes, protocols, and platforms to gain insights and actionable information. We have outlined below some of the many enhancements we have made because of welcome, continual feedback from our district partners, experts in the field, and routine state and agency visits to our schools including those conducted by the OCA and DRCT.

Over the past couple years, we installed a comprehensive student information system across all our schools to gather real-time data related to student behavior and academic outcomes to provide immediate feedback to our staff in the field, and to improve aspects of academic and behavioral programming. We are committed to finding data-driven insights to guide our decisions in the pursuit of positive student outcomes.

Students enrolled in High Road Schools require significant behavior support and de-escalation strategies. Our

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Ellen Gaske, PhD is Senior Vice President of Academics since 2014. Ellen's prior academic experience includes serving as an educator at Johns Hopkins University. Ellen earned her Ed.D. in Special Education and Learning Disabilities and a Master of Science in Communicative Disorders from Johns Hopkins University, and a Bachelor of Science in Education and Special Education from the University of Maryland. Ellen served a 4-year term on the Maryland Association of Special Education Facilities (MANSEF) Board. Ellen currently serves as a member of University of Maryland's Board of Trustees and on the Board of Visitors for the School of Education.



behavioral model ensures we can provide this level of support while ensuring students' safety. We monitor and report all restraints and seclusions. In response to feedback, and effective fall 2022, High Road Schools centralized its training program and appointed a regional training director so that de-escalation and restraint techniques are consistent across all High Road Schools. We reduced the number of restraints utilized in our programs by 24% during the 2022-2023 school year, demonstrating our dedication to using these techniques only as a means of last resort where a student is at risk of harming themselves or others.

High Road Schools are committed to hiring qualified team members who are mission-driven to provide a positive, supportive environment for students. While the report notes issues with documentation of employee background checks, currently, 100% of background checks and employer verifications for our employees are complete. Candidates must undergo a comprehensive background check as dictated by state requirements prior to hire, including criminal history background checks through fingerprinting.

We understand this report serves as a formal complaint to CSDE and High Road Schools welcomes the opportunity to have a more comprehensive forum and dialogue with CSDE to demonstrate our quality programming and ongoing compliance with state and federal regulations. Our decades-long relationship with both the CSDE and our local LEA partners has provided us effective supports for nurturing our students along their educational journey.