

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Receiving School Monitoring**

Receiving School: The Bridge Academy **County:** Mercer

Monitoring Dates: January 3 and 4, 2006

Monitoring Team: Carmen Fanucci, Karen Frumen, Deborah Magee, Dolores Walther, Elaine Lerner

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, The Bridge Academy conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided The Bridge Academy with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Bridge Academy developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

During the monitoring process, the monitoring team reviewed receiving school documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in IEPs, staff evaluations, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students/teachers/related service personnel and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with the receiving school's special education administrator, building principal, special education teachers, parents and related service personnel.

Noncompliant items reflected in this report may result in nonallowable costs in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23-4.1 through 4.16.

School Strengths:

The Bridge Academy is commended for offering a comprehensive language-based program for students age 8 to 18 with learning disabilities. Additionally, they maintain a three to one ratio for remedial reading instruction, and four to one ratio for writing instruction, with literature groups averaging five students.

To help students become independent learners, teachers instruct in organizational and study strategies. The strategies provide students with effective tools to comprehend and

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

master content material, vocabulary, and application. Students are taught strategies that work best for them given their individual learning styles.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Facility Requirements, Discipline, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the Bridge School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, The Bridge Academy accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and NJDOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT), speech/language therapy and counseling services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, The Bridge Academy identified concerns in the areas regarding maintenance of hearing aids. The Bridge Academy's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During an on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that The Bridge Academy has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, The Bridge Academy accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, criminal history verification and having an approved professional development plan.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding certified/licensed staff.

Area of Need:

Certified/Licensed Staff – During the on-site visit, through record reviews and staff interviews, it was determined that the receiving school does not meet the required standard of employing certified/licensed staff for counseling and math classes. During the on-site visit, a review of certifications indicated that the counselor employed by the Bridge Academy was not certified as a school counselor. Subsequent to the on-site visit, the DOE processed the approval for school counselor effective November 2005. In addition, certified teachers of students with disabilities were teaching math classes for the entire school day.

- **The Bridge Academy will revise its improvement plan to ensure that teachers are appropriately certified in the areas for which they teach. The**

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Receiving School Monitoring**

plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section V: Individualized Education Program/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, The Bridge Academy accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP meeting conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP meeting conducted with students, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, implementation of IEP components and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components.

Area of Need:

Communication to Sending Districts Regarding Missing IEP Components- During the on-site visit, through record reviews and staff interviews, it was determined that the school does not consistently communicate with sending districts when IEP components including, but not limited to, course of study, special education program and least restrictive environment (LRE) statements, are missing.

- **The Bridge Academy will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school communicates and collaborates with sending districts when IEP components, including but not limited to, course of study, special education program and LRE statements are missing. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in The Bridge Academy on January 3 and 4, 2006. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Bridge Academy's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

The Bridge Academy is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the receiving school was able to identify nearly all but two areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will bring about systemic change. The Bridge Academy is further commended for the many areas determined compliant by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

General Provisions, Facility Requirements, Discipline, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by The Bridge Academy during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by The Bridge Academy during the self-assessment and verified during the on-site visit include length of school day and year, physical education, services at no cost to parents, observation of program, provision of services as per IEP, provision of OT, speech therapy and counseling services as per IEP, private school dual employment, employment/job descriptions of paraprofessionals, criminal history verification, having an approved professional development plan, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP meeting conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, implementation of IEP components and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, The Bridge Academy identified an area of need regarding maintenance of hearing aids.

The on-site visit identified two additional areas of need within the various standards regarding certified/licensed staff and communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, The Bridge Academy will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the county office of education and to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.