

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education The Banyan School Monitoring**

Receiving School: Banyan School

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: January 10 and 11, 2005

Monitoring Team: Gregory Margolis, Ann Marie Bruder, Heather Mills-Pevonis

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Banyan School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Banyan School 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 Banyan School 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 the Banyan School's 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 Banyan School's special education administrators, building principal, special education teachers, related service personnel and parents.

School Strengths:

The Banyan School is commended for its strong focus on addressing the social skill needs of its students. To accomplish this initiative, the school has fully integrated a comprehensive social skills curriculum throughout all aspects of the school's programs and services. The social skills curriculum was created by a staff clinical psychologist and is based on empirical research. The lessons focus on developing relationships with peers, expressing emotions appropriately and general communication skills and are facilitated by the school's staff psychologists. Sessions are conducted either with a whole class or in small group settings. In addition, all school staff reinforce the program content during both their own formal instruction and more general interactions with the students. The program places considerable emphasis on generalizing the lessons beyond the classroom setting. The social skills program also incorporates a parent

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component that provides interested parents with a free-of-charge, seven-session parenting workshop series.

The Banyan School provides students with the opportunity to participate in a variety of peer and general mentoring programs. One program pairs middle school students with younger children in the elementary grades and provides frequent contact in which the students engage in a collaborative project. The Banyan School has also partnered with a local advanced care facility in which volunteer residents visit the school weekly and engage in a variety of activities with the students. For example, volunteers may read to younger students, assist with the completion of projects and share stories about their personal histories.

The Banyan School also provides students identified with severe reading deficiencies with a variety of remediation programs. In addition to instruction using established, multi-sensory curricula, the Banyan School also utilizes assistive technology to further facilitate reading skill development.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Staff Requirements and **Facility Requirements** were determined to be areas of compliance by the Banyan School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding annual reports and programs provided in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding policies and procedures, staff development and amendments. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents and extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding maintenance of hearing aids, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech language and counseling services as per IEP. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-

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site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing and implementation of IEP components.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, current IEP prior to service delivery and communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants and current IEP prior to service delivery. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components because it lacks a consistent administrative oversight component to ensure that missing IEP components are obtained from the sending districts. Areas consistently missing include frequency of related services for speech language therapy and occupational therapy. As a result, related services staff members are independently developing related services schedules for occupational therapy and speech language therapy based on prior documentation rather than on the current IEP. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

Areas of Need:

Informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives – During the on-site visit, through record review and staff interviews it was determined that although reports are generated for indicating students' progress on their individual goals and objectives, no definitive, regular schedule for sending reports (e.g., 3 times per year) to parents could be identified.

- **The Banyan School must develop procedures to ensure that parents are informed of student progress on IEP goals and objectives at least three times a year. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures and procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, and procedures for termination of student. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication, nursing services and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding procedures relating to school functions and services and transition. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Banyan School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding return of records upon termination, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified concerns in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code and written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences. The receiving school's improvement plan is

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sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted at the Banyan School on January 10 and 11, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Banyan School's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the Banyan School's improvement plan.

The Banyan School is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the Banyan School was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The Banyan School is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, most of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the receiving school is commended for the many areas that were determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Staff Requirements and **Facility Requirements** were determined to be areas of compliance by the Banyan School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the Banyan School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included annual reports, programs provided in nonsectarian settings, length of school day and year, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs, services provided in accordance with IEPs, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing relating to administration, statewide testing for support, assistance and implementation of IEP components, standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication, nursing services, policies, medical exams for sport teams, return of records upon termination, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written notice of placement to county office, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Banyan School identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, amendments, maintenance of hearing aids, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT) physical therapy (PT), speech language and counseling services as per IEP, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, current IEP prior to service delivery, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, procedures for termination of student, procedures relating to school functions and services, transition, conformance

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to pupil record code and written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences.

The on-site visit identified one additional area of need within the various standards regarding informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Banyan School 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.