

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

District: Buena Regional School District

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: September 17, 18, 19, 2001

Monitoring Team: C. Carthew, P. Fair, A. Popovici, J. Harmelin

Background Information

During the 2001 – 2002 school year, the Buena Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Buena Regional School District 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 protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families.
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

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 School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Buena Regional School District on September 13, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

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District Strengths:

The district has recognized several programs and has honored individual teachers who have met the needs of students with learning challenges in a manner that has been very beneficial to both students and the school community. The remedial reading specialists in each elementary school have proven to be quite helpful to at-risk students in the primary grades.

The special education middle school counselor has been very supportive to students who have an array of social/psychological problems. The students have been provided with a supportive, non-threatening environment to discuss their personal problems before reaching a frustration level. This year, the special education counselor formed a "Circle of Friends" at the start of the 2001-2002 school year to assist a physically challenged student and a developmentally disabled student at the middle school to achieve social success through the support of their peer groups.

The district provides an integrated occupational therapy program in the district's four self-contained elementary programs that has improved the sensory-motor integration skills of the students, resulting in improved work performance.

The district makes excellent use of computer technology by linking staff through an e-mail system. This system allows them to immediately communicate with each other about student progress, student concerns, and program needs. Staff members commented frequently about their ability to quickly share and receive information regarding students rather than experience delays as a result of a traditional "paper" process.

The district has also demonstrated an ability to anticipate the unique needs of students. For example, the district was aware of a child who was not yet enrolled in the district, who would be attending classes sometime in the near future. The district proactively provided specialized training to staff prior to the enrollment of this student. This allowed the student to immediately benefit from an educational setting that was able to support her individual needs.

The district should be commended for taking the initiative to maintain students with significant behavioral issues within the district by developing in-district programs that have the capacity to address the individual needs of these students.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and the dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development for both special education and general education teacher. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the provision of occupational therapy, physical therapy, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of extended school year, adaptive PE, and transfer students. The improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of adaptive PE and extended school year. Evidence of the change regarding ESY procedures was noted during the on-site visit. The district must revise its improvement plan for transfer students by identifying specific procedures. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these new procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of speech therapy and counseling.

Areas of Need:

Speech Therapy – On-site record review and interviews with staff determined that elementary speech services are provided on a 6-day cycle. Review of IEPs at the elementary level indicated students were to receive speech services on a weekly basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure students receive speech services in accordance with their IEPs.**

Counseling – On-site record review and interviews with staff determined the district does not maintain documentation of the provision of counseling services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of the provision of counseling services.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of consent.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, written notice, native language and independent evaluations. The district did not submit an improvement plan for these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice.

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Areas of Need:

Notice of a Meeting/Annual Review – On-site record review and staff interviews indicated that notices of a meeting for annual reviews do not specify the time of the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure its notices of a meeting, including annual review notices, identify the time of the meeting.**

Written Notice - On-site record review indicated that written notice is not provided subsequent to identification meetings or reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of written notice when required. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the sample notice forms provided by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, direct referrals by parents, and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the referral process for district staff, provision of the health summary, and identification meetings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings.

Areas of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screenings - During the on-site visit, record reviews and interviews indicated that though vision and hearing screenings are conducted, this information is not available at the time of the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that vision and hearing screening information is available at the time of the identification meeting.**

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V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding acceptance/rejection of reports. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the procedures are fully implemented.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding speech evaluation reports.

Areas of Need:

Speech Evaluation Reports - During the on-site monitoring, a review of speech evaluation reports indicated that speech/language evaluations did not include documentation of interviews conducted with the student's parent and teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language evaluations include all required components.**

VI. Reevaluation

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of conducting planning meetings and reevaluations for pupils turning age 5.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

VIX. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, establishing eligibility based on required criteria and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. Furthermore, evidence of change was noted during the on-site visit.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, alignment of goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address goals and objectives, 90-day timelines and age of majority. Evidence of change was noted in age of majority during the on-site visit. The district must revise their improvement plan for annual review timelines and IEP access to include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding related services.

Areas of Need:

Related Services – On-site review of student records determined that when related services were identified in the IEP the district did not specify whether the therapy would be provided individually or in a group.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of related services is specified in the IEP as being provided in a group or on an individual basis.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access, individualized decision-making, Oberti, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and the full continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of preschool placement options. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

X. Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding preschool transition planning conferences and EIP to preschool disabled by age three.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student/agency invitations to IEP meetings, agency involvement, and age 14 transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. During the on-site visit evidence of change was noted in the area of student invitations to meetings.

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

XI. Discipline

During self-assessment the district identified concerns regarding all areas of discipline. The plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks activities for implementing procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance in the areas of notification to case managers, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, behavioral intervention plans, and functional behavioral assessments. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding the provision of approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding student participation in assessments, IEP documentation, and the use of alternate assessments. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in all areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Written Notice - On-site record review indicated that written notice of graduation is provided subsequent to the student's graduation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided to students and parents prior to graduation.**

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XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, aides, group size, schedules, home instruction approvals and certifications.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding class size and common planning time. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding parent/adult student access, and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding the understanding of polices and procedures regarding student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding access sheets and documentation of the location of other student records.

Areas of Need:

Access Sheets - On-site record review indicated that access sheets were not consistently maintained in student files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure access sheets are maintained in student files.**

Documentation of Locations - On-site record review indicated that the location of other records maintained by the district is not identified in the central file.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it documents the locations of other records in the student's central file.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Buena Regional School District on September 17, 18, 19, 2001. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. Finally, the district is commended for its commitment to inclusive education for students with significant behavioral issues.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications, consent, child find, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, conducting meetings, eligibility, implementation dates, regular education access, individualized decision-making process, Oberti, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, full continuum, preschool transition planning conferences, EIP to preschool disabled by age three, accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP graduation requirements, age range, home instruction, student record access and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, provision of extended school year, adaptive PE, transfer students, surrogate parents, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, referral process, provision of health summary, identification meetings, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, copies of evaluation reports to parents, participants at meetings, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, transition service needs, discipline, student participation in statewide assessments, class size and common planning time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notices, vision and hearing screenings, related services, written notice of graduation, access sheets, and documentation of locations of other records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.

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