

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

**District:** Bedminster School District

**County:** Somerset

**Monitoring Date:** September 28, 2004

**Monitor:** Barbara J. Tucker

***Background Information:***

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Bedminster School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bedminster School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Bedminster School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) 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.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Bedminster School on September 28, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a comprehensive desk audit, with a review of district documents including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of teachers, related service personnel. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, child study team members and speech/language therapists. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, which is sufficient to appropriately address all areas of identified need.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for the **Homework Club** which provides an opportunity for students with disabilities and nondisabled students to complete homework assignments or study within a positive, academic environment. The program, which is run for a total

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of 5-hours a week, encourages independent and cooperative study skills. Students are able to use computers and research materials to complete their assignments.

The district also has a program entitled “**Character Counts.**” This character education program seeks to help all students, including those with disabilities, build strong character through learning trustworthiness, citizenship, caring, responsibility, respect and fairness. The program also encourages participation from community businesses by having the businesses display some of the students’ work, which most often comes in the form of posters, depicting or promoting one of the pillars of character. Throughout the year, students are involved in different activities in order to develop an understanding of each of these pillars.

### **Data Summary:**

The eligibility data provided by the Bedminster School District for the last three years indicate that the district’s classification rate has been declining and has consistently remained below the state average during that period of time. Further review of the eligibility data, as well as information from the self-assessment, show that although the district’s classification rate consistently declined over the past three years, the district continues to focus on this area by providing an improvement plan which addresses pre-referral interventions.

Data also indicate that during the 2002-2003 school year, the district was slightly above the state average of 41.6% for educating students with disabilities in general education classes with their peers for at least 80% of the school day. Through the expansion of their in-class support program and the hiring of instructional staff for the 2004-2005 school year, the district is hoping to increase this percentage.

### ***Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:***

**General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation Procedures, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment, Transition to Post-School, Discipline, Statewide Assessments, Graduation, Programs and Services and Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

### ***Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)***

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, length of school day/year, goals and objectives for related services, transfer students, facilities and certification of staff.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of speech/language services. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

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

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**Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of child find activities, referral process, direct referrals from parents and staff, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting participants/ timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of pre-referral interventions. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

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

**Section X: Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transition planning meetings and preschool students not having programs in place by age three. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

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

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## Summary

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bedminster School District on September 28, 2004. 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 Bedminster School district is highly commended for the outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas of need during the self-assessment process and for developing an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of improvement plan activities which it has already undertaken to bring about compliance.

A review of the data indicated that the district's is to be commended for a classification rate that has consistently remained below the state average during the past three years. The district will continue to focus on this area, by addressing its pre-referral interventions process. During the 2002-2003 school year, the district was one-tenth of a percent above the state average of 41.6% for educating its school-aged special needs students in general education classes with their peers for at least 80% of the school day. The district is optimistic however, that with an expanded in-class support program and the hiring of an additional instructor for the 2004-2005 school year, they may soon be able to demonstrate further improvement in this area.

At a focus group meeting on September 28, 2004, parents expressed concerns regarding in-class support for preschoolers, child study team turnovers, new staff members who may not be allowed to make the necessary changes, transition planning for 14 year olds, reporting of student progress to parents and provision of speech/language services. Parents were pleased to learn that the district has already begun to take appropriate measures to implement specific activities to address their concerns in many of these areas. With the exception of one parent, many of the parents at the meeting stated that the district includes them in the decisions which affect their child and are they are enthusiastic about the new staff members the district has hired this year. Although some parents expressed some skepticism, they said that they would be willing to give the new staff members an opportunity to implement new procedures and make needed changes.

General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation Procedures, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEPs, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition to Post-School, Discipline, Statewide Assessments, Graduation, Programs and Services and Student Records were all areas determined to be compliant with all of the standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, goals and objectives for related services, length of school day/ year, transfer students, facilities, certification of staff, child find activities, referral process, direct referrals from parents and staff, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of speech/language services, documentation of pre-referral interventions, transition planning meetings and early intervention students in a program by age three.

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

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**District Information :**

Mr. Ed Romano-President Board of ED  
Dr. Andre Rinko-Superintendent  
Mrs. Theresa Vaught-Director of Student Services