

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

District: Belleville School District **County:** Essex

Monitoring Dates: May 20, 21, 22 and 24, 2002

Monitoring Team: Damen G. Cooper, Janet Wright, Michael Lee and Susan Smahl

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Belleville School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Belleville 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 Belleville School District developed an improvement plan to address their 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 Belleville High School, on May 13, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and 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.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for taking the initiative to form and support the efforts of the Special Education Parents and Professionals Organization (S.E.P.P.O). This program allows parents of special education students and professionals to interact, communicate and discuss issues related to and effecting special education. Guest speakers have been invited to discuss relevant issues pertaining to the needs of special education students within the Belleville social and educational community.

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Reports indicate Belleville is consistently involved in various charitable activities. During the recent "Math-A-Thon," a program designed to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, students were responsible for obtaining sponsors for the successful completion of math problems. For a "Hop-A-Thon," the kindergarten students at Number 7 Elementary School participated to raise money to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

The Belleville School District is also commended for its "Pairing-and-Sharing" distance-learning grant. In the upcoming school years, students and teachers from Hoboken and Belleville will participate in a joint venture by sharing programs with each other.

Belleville Senior High School students participate in Project S.A.L.U.T.E. (Students Assistance Learning and Understanding Through Education) which facilitates the educational process within the district. This program promotes a safe, drug-free environment and serves to identify and refer "high-risk" and chemically dependent students to a drug and alcohol treatment system. In addition, the high school's "A-Team" is composed of special education students who learn to advocate for themselves and share these experiences and knowledge with other special education students. Groups discuss topics such as categories of learning disabilities and accommodation levels for special education classes. This has resulted in students being educated in the IEP process and in the development of their own IEPs. The "A-Team" participated in the 2001 Essex County Interagency Transition Consortium's "Transition Resource Fair" and the New Jersey Department of Education's "2001 Student Leadership Conference."

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions and **Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and 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 themselves compliant in the areas of facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services, transfer students and hearing aids. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified an area of need regarding length of the school day/year. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a procedure and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

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Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district does not routinely consider extended school year programs for all classified students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year is considered for each student with a disability. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to document those considerations in the IEP and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notice of meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, meetings and native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of written notice. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, summer referrals and identification meeting participants and timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS), standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance or rejection of reports.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS) and preschool students, functional assessments and written reports.

Areas of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluations for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services (ESLS) – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that ESLS evaluations did not include a statement from the teacher regarding the educational impact of the speech problem.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services contain an educational impact statement. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent and correct implementation of the procedures.**

Multidisciplinary Evaluations Preschool Students - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that preschool evaluations consisted of only one child study team evaluation and a speech evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multidisciplinary evaluations for preschool students include at least two child study team assessments in addition to the speech and language assessment. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessment – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that functional assessments lacked a developmental history and any interventions implemented in the general education setting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments include all required components. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that individual speech assessment reports included statements regarding eligibility determinations and specific therapy recommendations.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure individual reports do not contain statements or determinations that may only be made by a duly configured IEP team. The plan must include staff development and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding participants at planning meetings.

Areas of Need:

Participants at Planning Meetings – During the on-site visit, record review indicated an inconsistency in attendance of the regular education teacher at reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers participate at reevaluation planning meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and eligibility criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participants. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of documentation of eligibility and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority, annual review timelines and ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of IEP participants. The district has developed an improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of considerations/required statements, implementation dates and copies of IEPs to parents. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations/documentation, use of supplemental aids and services, general education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum of options. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of early intervention to preschool disabilities by age three. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

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Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age-fourteen transition services, courses, preferences/interest and needed transition services at age sixteen years.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitation and agency involvement. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation to the case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of interim alternative educational setting (IAES). The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments and manifestation determinations. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations/modifications, and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of alternate assessment. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Area of Need:

Written Notice – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that written notice of graduation is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided to all graduates as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.12(b). The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class-size waivers, age-range waivers, and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of team teaching. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of group sizes for speech therapy, case management time and consultation time. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Belleville School District on May 20, 21, 22 and 24, 2002. 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 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The parents in attendance, as well as those interviewed, expressed satisfaction with the cooperation and communication between their child's child study team and the current director. Some parents expressed a concern regarding the consideration and provision of an extended school year program. Many of the other concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting and through subsequent interviews 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 general provisions, facilities, certifications, obtaining consent, notices of meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals (parent/staff), multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, planning meetings and turning age five, criteria, eligibility, meetings, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review and ninety-day timelines, age-fourteen and age-sixteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, documentation to case manager, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, graduation IEP requirements, student records, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of related services, length of school year/day, transfer students, surrogate parents, written notice, holding of meetings, native language, Child Find 3-21, referral process, summer referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, participants and timelines for identification meeting, reevaluation timelines, eligibility participants, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, copies of IEP's to parents, least restrictive environment considerations and components, student agency invite, agency involvement, early intervention to preschool by age three, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational settings, alternate assessment, group sizes for speech therapy, team teaching, case management time, and collaboration time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, multidisciplinary evaluation reports for students eligible

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for speech and language services and preschool students, functional assessment, written reports, participants at planning meetings and written notice for graduation.

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