



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

All students have access to band, chorale, cheerleading, "Destination Imagination," student council, boys' and girls' basketball and softball, intramural sports, chess club, drama club, peer tutoring, and the academically talented program.

For students graduating from eighth grade and moving on to the receiving high school, the district provides an extensive transition program which services to address not only academic and coursework requirements but also a student's social and emotional needs.

In addition, the district is commended for its "Breakfast Club," a program offered to students having social adjustment and emotional issues, and its "Just Care" program which offers parents morning and afternoon daycare services for students. Moreover, the district newsletter, Bellmawr Pride, reaches out to both in-district and out-of-district students and serves to keep this community connected and informed.

### ***Data Summary:***

For the past three years, the Bellmawr Borough School District's classification rate of students requiring special educational programming and services has been stable and slightly below the state average. During the 2002-2003 school year, 13.4% of the district's resident enrollment, as compared to the state average of 13.9%, was found eligible for special education, and 3.1% was found eligible for speech only services, as compared to the state average of 2.1%.

In regard to placement, the district continues to place about a third of its students identified with a preschool disability in an out-of-district setting; with an increasing frequency toward separate public schools. For those three to five year olds who remain in-district, their placements tend to be in general education settings with supports and services.

For students ages six to twenty-one, the district's trend over the past three years has been to place fewer students in out-of-district settings; that is, separate public or private schools or residential facilities. Instead, it appears these students are now being transitioned into in-district programs. Moreover, the distribution of students, based on the time spent with general education students (i.e., greater than 80%, between 40% and 80%, and less than 40%), is relatively equal. Review of data also shows an equitable distribution of students, as based on category of eligibility (e.g., autistic, emotionally disturbed, specific learning disability) and racial-gender groupings, across various placements reflecting the least restrictive environment.

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

**Reevaluation, Discipline and Statewide Assessment** were determined by the district during self-assessment and confirmed by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site monitoring visit to be areas of compliance for the Bellmawr Borough School District.

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### **Section I: General Provisions**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of in-service training for professional and paraprofessional staff, as well as for parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need. **With regard to providing adequate professional development to staff, particularly in the self-identified area of effective transition practices, the district did not submit an improvement plan. The plan must identify a proposed outcome, a mechanism with which to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, and administrative oversight. In regard to in-service training for parents, the district reported that it does not fully identify parental needs. While the plan indicated that there would be yearly workshops, the district did not include a needs assessment, a long-term service plan, proposed outcomes for the training, a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of this training and an oversight component. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.**

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of programs and related services and physical therapy goals being included in the IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. **With regard to the additional self-identified area of transfer students, the district's improvement plan is insufficient because, although it notes development of written procedures to identify students with disabilities, it fails to include any training and administrative oversight. Implementation of these activities would ensure that the district provides appropriate educational programs and services for students who transfer from another school district without delay. Also, with regard to the self-identified area of consideration and provision of extended school year, the district's improvement plan is insufficient because, although the identified barrier is reported to be lack of staff knowledge and follow through, the plan does not include any training, proposed outcomes or an administrative oversight component. As a result, it is unclear not only what steps will be taken to ensure consideration of regression/recoupment issues for all students but also how the team will use that information to determine the need for extended school year programs. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements for these two areas.**

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of extended school year programming, frequency, location and duration of related services, and related services goals and objectives.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of Extended School Year Programming** – For those students who are found in need of extended school year programming, IEPs do not include description of the services needed, goals and objectives, implementation dates, and frequency, duration and location of services. As a result, review of a student’s IEP by a parent, case manager, teacher, related services provider or administrator would not provide a clear understanding of the service(s) required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure the extended school year program is described in the student’s IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff are fully aware of the identified needs of the student and that the agreed upon program is provided to adequately address those needs.**

**Frequency, Location and Duration of Related Services** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the district does not consistently document the frequency, location and duration of services. Further, the IEP often utilizes ranges to identify frequency (e.g., 1 to 2 times) and duration (e.g., 20 to 30 minutes). As a result, it is unclear when, where or for how long the service will be provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure IEP team identifies specific frequency, duration and location of all related services. Implementation of these activities will ensure the accurate implementation of related services which will support the student’s educational program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

**Related Services Goals and Objectives** – During the on-site monitoring, record review and parent, teacher and child study team interviews indicated that therapy goals and objectives were not consistently included in the IEPs of students requiring counseling or speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure goals and objectives are developed and included in IEPs for related services. Implementation of these activities will ensure related services providers are aware of specific student needs and are able to determine progress in meeting therapy benchmarks. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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### **Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, meetings and participants at meetings, notices in native language, interpreters, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, parental consent for initial evaluation, notice of meeting invites age 14 student, and written notice includes description of other relevant factors. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. **With regard to the additional self-identified area of timelines for written notice following a parental request and then the determination meeting, the district did not submit an improvement plan. The district will develop a plan that appropriately addresses barriers and includes procedural, training and oversight elements that will ensure written notice is provided in a timely manner.**

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

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**IEP as Written Notice** – Within the district's IEP, the "Notice Requirements for the IEP and Placement" page provides the necessary prompts and space for the case manager to add the needed elements for written notice. However, the page is not accurately or consistently completed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure the notice section of the IEP is accurately completed and provided to parents in a timely manner. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents have the opportunity to consider the proposed actions and request due process in the event the parent disagrees with the actions. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, and identification meetings timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21 and referrals to the child study team that would require summer (beyond the 10-month contract) work. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

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### Area(s) of Need:

**Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings** – At the time of the identification meeting, information concerning the health summary and results of the vision and hearing screenings are not consistently available. Staff interviews and record review indicated that only students who have gone through the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) have this information.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that the school nurse develops health summaries and conducts vision and hearing screenings on every child referred for an evaluation and provided to the team by the time the identification meeting is conducted. Implementation of these activities will ensure team members have the necessary information to identify suspected areas of disability and to determine the assessments needed to make an appropriate eligibility determination. The improvement plan must include an oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

### **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, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports, and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of screening a student to determine the need for an initial evaluation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. **With regard to the additional self-identified areas of parental consent for speech only evaluations, components of speech and language reports, and provision of speech reports to parents, the district's plan is insufficient because it lacks specific activities to remove the barriers as well as an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these activities to ensure that students who demonstrate a speech problem are appropriately evaluated and considered for services.**

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

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

#### Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. **With regard to the additional self-**

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identified areas of meetings for speech and language eligible students and participation of general education teachers at speech only eligibility meetings, the district's plan is insufficient because it lacks activities to remove the barriers and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these activities. Also, with regard to the additional self-identified area of signatures of agreement or disagreement, the district's plan calls for use of a new format, but lacks any discussion of training and administrative oversight to ensure that district personnel state in writing whether they agree or disagree with eligibility determinations. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these activities.

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

### **Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, and provision of IEP to parent.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation dates, primarily for related services to be provided from September to June, teacher knowledge and access, and 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit in regard to required components of speech only IEPs.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Required Components of Speech Only IEPs** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that IEPs of students eligible for speech and language services only do not consistently or appropriately address all required components. While the IEP document allows and even prompts for such discussion, some areas, for example, the components of extended school year and statewide assessment, are left blank.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that the speech only IEP specifies the consideration of extended school year needs and statewide assessment needs. Implementation of these activities will ensure the team documents the decision-making process and more clearly defines the rationale for specific decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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**Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of general education access and notification and participation of students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual decision-making process, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit in regard to least restrictive environment documentation.

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Least Restrictive Environment Documentation/Oberti** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that IEPs of special education students and speech only students do not consistently include or appropriately address all four statements required when considering the least restrictive environment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that the IEP specifies the consideration of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications; the explanation of why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate; and documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. Implementation of these activities will ensure the team documents the decision-making process and more clearly defines the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Section X: Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, and agency involvement.

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

**Section X: Transition to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

Although the Bellmawr Borough School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade, during the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in



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the area of student invitation and meeting participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. **With regard to the additional self-identified area of need regarding student preferences and interests, the district's plan is insufficient because it lacks training and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these activities.**

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

### ***Section XIII: Graduation***

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

The Bellmawr Borough School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade and is not required to address issues of graduation.

### ***Section XIV: Programs and Services***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, group sizes for speech, home instruction, and common planning time.

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

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

### ***Section XV: Student Records***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets and location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student records procedures, parent and adult-student access to records, and maintenance and destruction of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of needs.

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

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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the **Bellmawr Borough School District** on January 14 and 15, 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 district is commended for the comprehensive review it conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify most areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Reevaluation, Discipline and Statewide Assessment were sections demonstrating compliance with all standards.

For the past three years, the district's classification rate of students requiring special educational programming and services has been stable and slightly below the state average. In regard to placement, the district has been increasing the number of students (i.e., 3 to 5 years and 6 to 21 years) being educated in the general education setting.

One parent and two child study team members participated in a public focus group meeting. Additional information was submitted by four parents and community representatives who were unable to attend. In general, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the high quality of education offered. Parents were pleased with the district's responsiveness to their concerns and to the needs of their children. Reports indicated that special education timelines are maintained, IEP documents are kept current, and programming and related services are provided as written in the IEP. However, specific concerns were raised over perceived budgetary constraints in permitting, for example, speech therapy and extended school year services. One parent reported that there is often a delay in receiving a finalized IEP following an annual review meeting. Additionally, parents noted that student progress in meeting IEP goals and objectives is not effectively monitored by the case manager and such information is rarely reported to parents on a consistent basis. One parent suggested that the district's execution of the self-assessment was flawed because parents were not included in the 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, length of school day, facilities, certifications, consent, meetings and participants, notices in native language, interpreters, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification timelines and meeting participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports, criteria and statement of eligibility, IEP meetings and participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, provision of IEP to parent, general education access, notification and participation of student in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, agency involvement, class size, age range, group sizes for speech, home instruction, common planning time, access sheets, and location of other records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-serve training for professional and paraprofessional staff and parents, provision of programs and related services, physical therapy goals in the IEP, transfer procedures, consideration of extended school year, surrogate parents, parental consent for initial evaluation, notice of meeting when transition is being discussed, written notice includes description of other relevant factors, written notice following a parental request, Child Find 3-21, direct referrals impacting summer employment of staff, screenings to determine need for an initial evaluation, parental consent for speech only evaluations, components of speech and language reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to eligibility meeting, convening meetings for speech and language eligible students, participation of general education teachers at speech only eligibility meetings, signatures of assenting or dissenting opinions, implementation dates, teacher knowledge and access, ninety-day timelines, individual decision making, consideration of supplemental aids and services, continuum of programs, age 14 student invite and meeting participation, student preferences and interests, program descriptions, student records procedures, parent and adult-student access to records, and maintenance and destruction of records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding documentation of extended school year, frequency, duration and location of related services, related services goals and objectives, written notice, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, required components of speech only IEPs, and least restrictive environment documentation/Oberti.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the **Bellmawr Borough School District** will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.