

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

District: Belmar School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: May 13, 2005

Monitoring Team: Vanessa Leonard

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Belmar School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Belmar 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 Belmar 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 Belmar Elementary School, on April 7, 2005. 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, related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for providing the Youth Government program. All sixth, through eighth grade students are invited to participate in Youth Government. This program teaches students about government at the local level. Students are either elected or appointed to positions, which correspond to those in their town. On Youth Government Day, students walk to the borough hall and meet the person that holds their

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corresponding position. Students also run and participate in local town meetings and Board of Education meetings.

The district provides the Peer Leadership Program. Peer facilitators are students who have received special training which enables them to assist other students learn concepts and skills such as exploring alternative responses and making responsible decisions in difficult situations. The primary focus of the Peer Leadership program is to provide trained peer mentors for younger students who demonstrate problems relating to academics and self image. Peer mentors include nondisabled students and students with disabilities who exhibit traits which would allow others to feel comfortable discussing issues of concern.

Data Summary:

The Belmar School District had a classification rate of 16.4% for 2004. The district rate is 1.8% higher than the state average. There are 531 students enrolled in the district and 93 of those students were eligible for special education and related services. During the self-assessment period, the district identified supplementary aids and services and a continuum of program options to be areas of need. The district now offers a full continuum of programs. In 2004, 52.9% of classified students were receiving instruction in the general education setting for more than 80% of the day. This was 11% higher than the state average for 2004. In that same year, Belmar School District placed 30% of its students ages 3-5 in general education early childhood settings. This is 15.4% higher than the state average for 2004.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Location Referral and Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluations, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services 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 identified compliance in the areas of extended school year for students eligible for special education and related services, provision of programs, related services goals and objectives, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year for students eligible for speech-language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year Services for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services-During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district does not consider extended school year services for students who are eligible for speech and language services.

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- The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities that ensure that extended school year is considered for all students receiving speech and language services and provided for students when necessary. These activities will result in the consideration of regression/recoupment issues for all students as well as any other factors that may impact a student's level of academic performance. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of health summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of eligibility meeting participants, criteria and statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disability.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of signatures of agreement/disagreement and copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance, goals and objectives, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation dates and IEPs to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, LRE documentation, general education access and nonacademic/extracurricular activities for out-of-district students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of supplementary aids and services and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 in the Belmar School District on May 13, 2005. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Ten parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Overall parents were pleased with the quality of education their children receive. Many parents stated that the district advocated inclusion in the general education classroom. Parents expressed that district staff are caring and teachers communicate regularly with parents. Parents stated that they welcome partners in the education of their child.

General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Location Referral and Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluations, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services 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.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year services for students eligible for special education and related services, provision of programs, related services goals and objectives, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines/participants, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disability, IEP meetings/participants, considerations and required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance, goals and objectives, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access responsibility, decision making process, LRE documentation, general education access in district and nonacademic/extracurricular activities for out-of-district students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding health summaries, signatures of agreement/disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to eligibility meetings, implementation dates, IEPs to parents, consideration of supplementary aids and services and continuum of programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year for students eligible for speech/language services.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Belmar School District will revise and submit the required revisions to the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.