

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

School: Bergen County Technical Schools

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: December 12, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Bergen County Technical Schools conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bergen County Technical Schools 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 Bergen County Technical Schools 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed documents, including 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 special education administrators as well as with parents of students with disabilities and adult students with disabilities.

Data Summary:

A three year review of the district's placement data from 2002 to 2004, indicates that the district is below the state average in educating students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Those percentages were 13.1% in 2004, 14.6% in 2003 and in 2002, 15.8%. However, for the same three years, the district exceeded the state average in the placement of students in the general education setting between 40% and 80% of the school day. From 2002-2004, these rates were 62.4%, 65.8% and 67.4% respectively. Comparison with state rates must be conducted with caution since Bergen County Technical Schools is a receiving school district and the student population differs from the population of a typical school district.

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The percentages of students classified for 2004, 2003 and 2002 were 17%, 16.3% and 16.8% respectively. Although these figures were above the state average of 14.6%, 14.2% and 13.9% respectively, it should be noted that Bergen County Technical Schools is a receiving district and reserves more than 20% of freshman enrollment for students with disabilities from a wide geographic area resulting in a high classification rate.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant: Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. The areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services and for students eligible for speech language services. Areas compliant for one group of students or the other are noted.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation ▪ Extended school year ▪ Transfer procedures
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Provision of notice of a meeting ▪ Content of notice of a meeting ▪ Meetings ▪ Provision of written notice ▪ Content of written notice ▪ Interpreters at meeting ▪ Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral process ▪ Pre-referral interventions ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Educational impact statement ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation ▪ Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30 ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities ▪ Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs ▪ Continuum of programs
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” ▪ Identification of post-secondary liaison ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to the student’s desired outcomes

Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an ‘X’ in the ‘Needs Revision’ column.

Section	Area	Improvement Plan Review		
		Sufficient	Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
General Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent Training – the district does not have a mechanism to identify parental concerns or the need for parent training. 			X
FAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of Program – the district has not been successful in securing instructors to provide home instruction. ▪ Provision of Related Service – the district has not implemented the related services of counseling and occupational therapy in a timely fashion. 	X		X

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Section	Area	Improvement Plan Review		
		Sufficient	Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notices in Native Language – although Spanish interpreters were provided at meetings, notices were not provided in native language. 			X
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find 3-21 – the district is a receiving district and was unaware of Child Find responsibilities. ▪ Health Summary – procedures had not been established. ▪ Vision and Hearing Screening procedures had not been established. ▪ Identification Meeting Timelines – referrals were not date-stamped therefore timelines could not be determined. 			X X X
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional Assessments – observations were not always conducted as required. 			X
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signatures of Agreement and Disagreement – district personnel were unaware of code requirements. ▪ Copy of Evaluation Reports – provision of evaluation reports were not consistently provided to parents • . 	X		X
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting Participants – participants required to attend were not always present or not clearly noted on the IEP. • IEP Considerations and Required Statements - IEPs did not contain goals and objectives for related services and for special education classes. • 90-Day Timelines – timelines were not always met for eligibility and provision of program. 	X		X X

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Section	Area	Improvement Plan Review		
		Sufficient	Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation Dates – the district reported typographical errors in IEPs, delays in informing teachers of responsibility and delays in the provision of related services. 			X
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning at Age 16, IEP Statement of “Needed Transition Services” – activities conducted did not reflect students’ interests and preferences. 			X

Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
Least Restrictive Environment	Decision Making – there was no evidence in the IEP that general education is the first placement considered and that supplemental aids were considered.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP team considers general education placement first and that the IEP specifies the supplemental aids and services that were considered and an explanation as to why those aids and services were rejected. Implementation of these activities will document the decision making process and more clearly define the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bergen County Technical School District on December 12, 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. The district is acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change.

A three year review of the school's placement data from 2002 to 2004, indicates that the district is below the state average in educating students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Those percentages were 13.1% in 2004, 14.6% in 2003 and in 2002, 15.8%. However, for the same three years, the district exceeded the state average in the placement of students in the general education setting between 40% and 80% of the school day. From 2002-2004, these rates were 62.4%, 65.8% and 67.4% respectively. Comparison with state rates must be conducted with caution since the district population differs from the population of a typical school district.

The percentages of students classified for 2004, 2003 and 2002 were 17%, 16.3% and 16.8% respectively. Although these figures were above the state average of 14.6%, 14.2% and 13.9% respectively, it should be noted that the Bergen County Technical School District is a receiving school district and reserves more than 20% of freshman enrollment for students with disabilities from a wide geographic area resulting in a high classification rate.

During interviews conducted with parents and adult students by phone, many parents and students expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. Adult students were especially pleased with the amount of programs that utilized their strengths in community-based settings. Additionally, these students feel prepared to transition successfully to their desired post-secondary setting.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation, extended school year, transfer procedures, consent, implementation without undue delay, provision of notice of a meeting, content of notice of a meeting, meetings, provision of written notice, content of written notice, interpreters at meeting, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, educational impact statement, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators, eligibility meeting participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability), IEP provided to parent prior to implementation, meetings held annually, or more often if necessary to review and/or revise IEPs, annual reviews completed by June 30, teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs), notification of and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, opportunity for all students with disabilities to access general education programs, continuum of programs, beginning at age 14 "transition services

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needs,” identification of post-secondary liaison, student and agency invitation to IEP meetings, and activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to student’s desired outcomes.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent training, provision of program, provision of related services, notices in native language, Child Find 3-21, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, signatures of agreement and disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting participants, IEP required considerations and statements, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, and beginning at age 16, a “statement of needed transition services.”

Areas of need originally identified by the district and determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are parent training, provision of programs, notices in native language, Child Find 3-21, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting participants, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, and beginning at age 16, a “statement of needed transition services.” These areas were verified by the NJDOE as corrected and now compliant.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the Least Restrictive Environment standard regarding decision making and documentation of supplementary aids and services considered. The district must ensure that general education is the first placement considered for students with disabilities.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Bergen County Technical Schools will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the OSEP to address the area that requires revision.