

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

District: Bergenfield School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: January 21 and 22, 2004

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller, Zola Mills, Jenifer Spear and Carol Raff

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Bergenfield School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bergenfield 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 Bergenfield 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 Bergenfield High School on January 13, 2004. 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, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for initiating inclusion opportunities for pre-school and kindergarten students in general education. Additionally, one of the district's elementary schools provides tutoring and individualized instruction to kindergarten students prior to or after the regular kindergarten session to address academic skill weaknesses.

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The district provides a wide range of middle school program options for classified students. Special and general education teachers work collaboratively with grade level teams. Most special education students participate in their IEP meetings beginning in the middle school with emphasis on self-advocacy and transition needs.

High school disabled students are offered support classes during each period of the day to receive assistance. In addition to resource classes and in-class support, these students are also afforded the opportunity to take Spanish with an in-class support teacher.

Part One Data Summary:

The Bergenfield School District reported a classification rate of 16% for the 2002-2003 school year which is above the state average. Although these percentages exceed the state average, it should be noted that the district classification rate has declined from the previous year. The district submitted an improvement plan to further address its classification rate. The data submitted by the district indicated that the placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average and the district has developed a plan, which it is currently implementing, to increase inclusion opportunities for pre-school disabled students. Additional district data was provided during the on-site visit that indicated that placement in general education settings for pre-school disabled students has increased in the current school year. For students ages 6-21 the need to increase the percentage of students with disabilities in general education from between 40-80% of the day to more than 80% was noted. In the 2002-2003 school year, 30.4% were in the general education setting for more than 80%; 35.6% were in the general education setting between 40-80%, 21.6% for less than 40% and 12.3% were in separate settings. The district developed an improvement plan to increase the participation of special education students in general education.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Statewide Assessments and Graduation Requirements 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 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 parent and professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of related services, monitoring of IEPs and hearing aid procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content and provision of notices of meetings and written notices. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of Child Find.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants and timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site 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 standardized assessments and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance or rejection of outside evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants at planning meetings and reevaluating pre-school students by June 30th of their last year in pre-school.

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

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 meetings and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, copy of evaluation reports to parents, signature of agreement or disagreement and eligibility criteria. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site 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 IEP meetings and participants and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, IEPs to parents, implementation dates, ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services and regular education access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests and courses of study.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age sixteen needed transition services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Section X: Transition to Pre School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition conferences and the provision of preschool services by age three

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination meetings and interim alternative educational setting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consultation, age range waivers, class size waivers and home instruction notification to county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of group size for speech therapy, provision of sufficient staff for case management responsibilities and therapies and description of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access to record, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of other locations and procedures for student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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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 Bergenfield School District on January 21 and 22, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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. Many parents that attended the focus meeting shared that the district's staff were supportive and understanding of their children's and family needs. Some parents expressed concerns about the large caseloads of child study team members and therapists.

A review of district data indicated that the district is providing services to a significant number of students in the general education setting for more than 40% of the school day. The district has developed an improvement plan to increase the participation of students in general education for more than 80% of the day as well as increase the number of pre-school disabled students in general education settings. Although overall district data reflected a classification rate above the state average, there is a decrease in the classification rate from the previous year. Further, the district has initiated specific activities to address this area of need.

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, extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, standardized assessments, independent evaluations, reevaluation planning meeting, participants at planning meetings and reevaluation by June 30th of students' last year in pre-school, eligibility meetings, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings and participants annual review timelines, notification and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs, pre-school transition, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, statewide assessment, graduation requirements, age range waivers, class size waivers, home instruction notification, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent training, provision of programs and related services, monitoring of IEPs, hearing aid procedures, content and provision of notices of meetings and written notices, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance or rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meeting participants,

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signatures of agreement or disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, criteria, IEP considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision making process, documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, age sixteen needed transition service needs, procedural safeguards for discipline, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, group size for speech therapy, sufficient staff for case management and therapies, description of programs, documentation of other locations and policies for records and staff knowledge.

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