

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

District: Berlin Borough School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: October 22 and 23, 2003

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Michael Lee

Background Information:

During the 2002-2003 school year, the Berlin Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Berlin Borough 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 Berlin Borough 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 Berlin Borough School on October 22, 2003. 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 now collaborates with Head Start and private preschools to ensure access to general education programs for their preschool disabled population. The district also has five Team Approach Model (TAM) classes which afford additional general education opportunities for preschool disabled children.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district utilizes the Earobics program for students with auditory processing and discrimination deficits. This program assists in phonemic recognition and discrimination.

The district is commended for expanding school-based instruction for three autistic students by including home-based discrete trial instruction. Further, the district provided a long-distance learning program for one student who is unable to enter the school building due to health concerns.

Data Summary:

The Berlin Borough School District reported a classification rate of 12.9% for the 2001-2002 school year, which is below the state average of 13.4%. During the 2002-2003 school year, 50.4% of the students eligible for special education and related services were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day; this is above the state average of 41.6%. It should be noted that since the 2000-2001 school year, the Berlin Borough School District has increased the number of students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day by almost 11%. In addition, the district has no staff on emergency certificates, has not suspended any special education or general education student, and has included 100% of students eligible for special education and related services in statewide assessments. The data submitted by the district indicated that placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average. 50.0% of these students are placed in settings that do not offer access to general education. The district has addressed this area through their improvement plan.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Evaluation, Reevaluation, 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 professional and parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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, related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, and oversight of IEP implementation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of certifications, provision of an adaptive physical education program and hearing aides. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district corrected the provision of an adaptive physical education program prior to the on-site visit.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding location and duration of related services.

Area of Need:

Location and Duration of Related Service Programs - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not consistently document the location and duration of services. As a result, it is unclear where and for how long the services are provided. The IEP states that a student will receive a related service for "20-30 minutes" by the "social worker or psychologist" in "Berlin Community School (BCS)".

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the child study team member of the IEP team identifies specific durations and locations of all related service programs. The implementation of these activities will ensure that students receive related services that support the educational program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and content of notices of meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. It was determined that the district corrected content of notices of meetings prior to the on-site visit.

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

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary, prereferral interventions, and nature and scope of evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. It was determined that the district corrected the area of health summary prior to the on-site visit.

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, participants, criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting and signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district corrected the area of provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting prior to the on-site visit.

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 accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, and teacher knowledge and access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of considerations and required statements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, continuum, regular education access, accommodations and modifications, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, and academic and behavioral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section X: Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

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

No 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 area of student and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, and post-secondary outcomes. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative educational settings.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager and documentation of teacher concerns. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child study team knowledge of the content of statewide assessments, resulting in difficulty in administering and providing accommodations and modifications. It should be noted that this area of concern was corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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 class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction approvals, and schedules.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child study team personnel, provision of programs, and common planning time for teachers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district corrected the areas of child study team personnel and common planning time for teachers prior to the on-site visit.

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 records and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets, maintenance, and documentation of locations of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district corrected the areas of access sheets and documentation of locations of other records prior the on-site visit.

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

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Berlin Borough School District on October 22 and 23, 2003. 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 that review the district was able to identify all but one area 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.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the number of students with disabilities who participate in general education. The district has not suspended any students with disabilities or general education students and had 100% participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment. The district indicated a need to increase the percentage of preschool students who have access to a general education setting. The district has developed a plan to address this need through their 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. Parents were pleased with the services and programs that their children were receiving. They also expressed their satisfaction with the level of collaboration with the child study team. Students are invited and included in IEP meetings at the seventh and eighth grade levels. Parents expressed a desire to begin a support group within the district.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Evaluation, Reevaluation, Preschool Transition, and Graduation Requirements.

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 day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, consent, written notice, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, child find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants and timelines, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, student and agency invitation to meetings, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, schedules, parent/adult student access to records, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, certifications, hearing aides, surrogate parents,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

prereferral interventions, nature and scope of evaluations, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services, considerations and required statements, individualized decision-making, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, regular education access, accommodations and modifications, academic and behavioral interventions, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, post-secondary outcomes, documentation of suspensions to case manager, documentation of teacher concerns regarding discipline, provision of programs, and maintenance of records.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are provision of adaptive physical education program, content of notices of meetings, health summary, copies of evaluation reports to parents, child study team personnel, child study team samples of statewide assessment, common planning time for teachers, access sheets, and documentation of location of other records.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding location, site, and duration of related service programs.

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