

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

**District:** Bernards Township

**County:** Somerset

**Monitoring Dates:** September 10, 11, 2001

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**Background Information**

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Bernards Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bernards Township 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 Bernards Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on September 6, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

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

**General Provisions** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

### **Section II: F.A.P.E.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, IEP implementation, progress reports to parents, and transfer procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 area of independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding notice of a meeting, provision of translators at meetings, written notice, meetings in the native language and the 15-day timeline. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding surrogate parents, consent for initial evaluations and reevaluations.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Surrogate Parents** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not have procedures for the selection and training of surrogate parents.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the selection and training of surrogate parents.**

**Consent for Initial Evaluations and Reevaluations** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the child study teams indicated that parental consent is obtained, the district does not consistently maintain documentation of this consent for initial evaluations or reevaluations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that documentation of parental consent for initial evaluations**

and reevaluations is maintained. If parental consent cannot be obtained prior to reevaluation, the district must document all attempts to obtain consent. It is recommended that the district provide staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding health and medical summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

In addition, the district identified a concern regarding PAC/pre-referral interventions. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include staff training on the new PAC/Pre-Referral Intervention procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these new procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding Child Find activities, direct referrals from parents and teachers, dates on referral forms, and 20-day timelines.

##### **Areas of Need**

**Child Find Activities** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined the district's Child Find activities are not implemented during the summer months.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities continue throughout the year including summer months, to locate and refer potentially disabled students 3-21, including migrant and homeless students.**

**Direct Referrals** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined the district's procedures do not include a process for direct referrals by parents and/or staff to the child study team for school age students suspected of having a disability.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that staff and parents have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to**

**ensure full implementation of these activities. It is recommended that the district provide staff development training regarding the direct referral process.**

**20-Day Timeline/Accurate Dates on Referrals** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not have procedures to ensure the convening of an identification meeting within 20 days of receiving a referral.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that an identification meeting is held within 20 days of the referral date. The improvement plan must include an oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

## **Section V: Evaluation**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of standardized assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding acceptance/rejection of reports, speech/language evaluation reports and reports to parents, speech/language functional assessments, speech/language multi-disciplinary evaluations and native language assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

The district also identified concerns regarding the functional assessment of students eligible for special education programs and related services and assessments for Limited English Proficiency students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need. The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures, staff training and an oversight component to ensure implementation of the newly developed procedures.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visits regarding written reports.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Written Reports** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although written reports were developed and signed, the evaluators did not date their reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all written reports are signed and dated. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

## Section VI.   Reevaluation

### **Summary of Findings:**

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the three-year timeline for reevaluations for both students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services and reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in the preschool program.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Three-year Timeline for Reevaluations** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district did not meet the three-year timeline for reevaluations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are conducted every three years or sooner if conditions warrant. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

**Reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup>** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district did not complete reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in a preschool program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in a preschool program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

## Section VII.   Eligibility

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding evaluation reports to parents, eligibility criteria, and the statement of eligibility.

### **Area of Need:**

**Evaluation Reports to Parents** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the child study team members indicated that evaluation reports are provided to parents, documentation of the provision of these reports is not maintained.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents and adult students is maintained. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Eligibility Criteria/Statement of Eligibility** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although child study team members use a severe discrepancy formula, they do not document the results of the application of the formula.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is suspected of having a specific learning disability, the documentation of criteria for determination of eligibility includes a statement as to whether or not there is severe discrepancy between achievement and ability that is not correctable without special education and related services. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

## **Section VIII: Individual Education Program**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives/CCCS, implementation dates, and teacher access/knowledge of IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding considerations and required statements, copy of the IEP to parent(s) or adult student(s) prior to implementation, age of majority and IEP meetings/program changes. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Annual Reviews** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district did not complete annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services and for those students eligible for speech/language services in a timely manner.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all annual reviews are completed in a timely manner. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

## **Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access and the continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding placements based on individual needs, documenting the discussion and considerations of the benefits of regular education placement, and specifying the supplementary aides

and services and program modifications that have been considered and discussed. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding notification to out-of-district students regarding extra-curricular activities within district.

**Areas of Need:**

**Notification of Extra-curricular Activities for Out-of-District Students** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the majority of out-of-district students do not participate in extra-curricular activities within the district and that those that do participate are typically notified by siblings who attend school within the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all out-of-district students are notified of extra-curricular activities offered by the district. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the statement of transition services needs for students age 14 or younger, the statement of needed transition services for students age 16 or older, community-based resources, collaboration with community and outside agencies/resources, post-secondary liaison, students' interests and preferences, annual goals/objectives relating to desired post-school outcomes, student invitations, outside agencies and/or shared-time vocational school program personnel and participation of outside agency representative(s). The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding courses of study.

**Areas of Need:**

**Course of Study** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not identify the student's courses of study as it relates to transition as part of the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the inclusion of the student's courses of study in the IEP. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of this procedure.**

## **Section X: Transition from Preschool**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding transition from an early intervention program to a preschool program. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding documentation of attendance at preschool transition planning conferences.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Preschool Transition Planning Conferences** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although a representative from the child study team attends preschool transition planning conferences, the district does not maintain documentation of that participation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents attendance at preschool transition planning meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of this procedure.**

## **Section XI: Discipline**

### **Summary Of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notification to the case manager, procedural safeguards regarding discipline of students identified as potentially disabled, Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs), Manifestation Determinations, consultation with special education teachers when short term removals are not a change in placement, parents' due process rights, due process hearings for removals from program for dangerousness and the provision of information to authorities of a student who has been arrested. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

## **Section XII. Statewide Assessment**

### **Summary of Findings:**

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



During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding alternative assessments, Special Review Assessment process for students who fail one or more sections of the HSPT/HSPA and child study team content knowledge. The district has developed an improvement that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these components.

In accordance with the August 1, 2001 memo issued by the Office of Special Education Programs, the district will ensure that those students who are eligible to participate in the alternate assessment program are identified. The district also needs to provide in-service training and begin the assessment process in November. It is recommended that each Child Study Team member be provided with a copy of "The Directory of Test Specifications" (DTS) for each content area and/or the sample form of the ESPA, GEPA and HSPT/HSPA.

### **Section XIII: Graduation**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding documentation of graduation requirements in the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding written notification of graduation to students both in and out of district and diplomas.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Notification of Graduation** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not provide Notice of Graduation to students who attend programs both in and out of district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students both in and out of district are provided with Notice of Graduation and that the provision is documented in their files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Diplomas** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not notify graduating out-of-district students that they have a choice of receiving a diploma from the out-of district school or from their home district school.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that graduating out-of-district students are notified of the choice to receive a diploma from the out-of district school or from their home district school. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

## **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 waivers, group sizes and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding supplementary instruction programs and self-contained program descriptions. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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/adult student access, maintenance/destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding access sheets. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bernards Township School District on September 10, 11, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to self-identify almost all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further 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. The district had already identified during the self-assessment process many of the concerns that were raised by the parents during the focus group meeting.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included staff development, independent evaluations, summer referrals, standardized assessments, eligibility meetings, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, teacher IEP access and knowledge, student access to regular education, continuum of programs, interim alternative educational settings, statewide assessment participation, statewide assessment accommodations/modifications, statewide assessment IEP documentation, class size, age range, home instruction, student record access and student record maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, transfer students, notices, timelines, referral process, evaluations, IEPs components and required statements, provision of IEPs to parents, least restrictive environment, transition, discipline, alternative assessments and student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding location, referral and identification, eligibility, timelines, evaluation and reevaluation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.

