

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

District: Bethlehem School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: May 11, 2004

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Bethlehem School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bethlehem 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 Bethlehem School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a comprehensive desk audit, including a review of representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information, as well as holding a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Thomas Conley Elementary School on May 11, 2004. Parent interviews were also conducted in order to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff from the Office of Special Education Programs that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, with some revision, that will appropriately address several areas of identified need.

Data Summary:

The Bethlehem Township School District data indicate a classification rate of 12.6%, which is slightly below the state average of 13.4%. A review of the district's self-assessment findings indicated the district has identified areas of need regarding Child Find activities. The district is commended for increasing the number of students with disabilities who are educated in the general education setting more than 80% of the school day from 63% in 2001 to 75% in 2002.

The district's data show that 11% of the preschool disabled population are educated in general education settings, up from 0% in the 2001 school year. While this is a

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substantial increase, the district recognizes the need for continued improvement. The district has developed a relationship with a community day care facility that will rent space from the district for the 2004-2005 school year. This association will allow the district to develop an integrated preschool program.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for applying for and receiving a federal grant, *Supporting Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms*, which allowed the district to purchase assistive technology and related professional training, thus increasing the district's ability to support special education students in the general education setting.

The district is further commended for developing a social skills group that incorporates special education students and regular education students at the elementary level in order to provide opportunities for enhanced peer relations.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Statewide Assessment 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of policies and procedures.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training and dissemination of IDEA information. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. Furthermore, it was determined through the comprehensive desk audit that the district has taken appropriate steps to remedy these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, transfer students and adaptive physical education. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district has begun to take appropriate steps to remedy these areas.

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No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral interventions and direct referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, written reports and acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. It was determined through the desk audit that the district has made progress in correcting these identified areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three year timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of providing written notice of the IEP team decision in the event that it is determined no new evaluations are warranted to continue eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, criteria and statement of eligibility for students determined eligible as specific learning disabled.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of signatures of agreement/disagreement and rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to a meeting and the statement of eligibility for students determined eligible for speech services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, 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 meeting participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, observing proposed placements and IEPs to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district and continuum of program options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification of nonacademic and extracurricular activities to out-of-district students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of beginning a student's program by the age of three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of a preschool transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Post-school

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of transition service needs.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

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

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of suspension to case managers and protection of potentially disabled students under the disciplinary requirements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XIII: Graduation

The Bethlehem School District is an elementary school district and is not required to address compliance regarding graduation as it pertains to secondary school requirements.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size and age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and an also an issue regarding team teaching occurring at the middle school level. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of records in other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the areas of access to student records and dissemination of information to district personnel regarding pupil record code requirements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bethlehem School District on May 11, 2004. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 their exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the implementation of activities to bring about correction in some of the identified areas of need as well as the number of areas identified as compliant by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Statewide Assessment was an area demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting several parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In general, the district was praised for its efforts to meet the individual needs of special education students, for staff involvement and outstanding professionalism and district personnel's ability to immediately address parental concerns in a collaborative manner.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, provision of programs, related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, interpreters at meetings, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, three year timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, meeting participants, statement of eligibility for students determined eligible as specific learning disabled, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district, continuum of program options, beginning a student's program by the age of three, transition service needs, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim-alternative educational settings, suspension tracking, procedural safeguards, class size and age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of records in other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, transfer students, adaptive physical education, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, multidisciplinary evaluations, written reports, acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations, providing written notice of the IEP team decision in the event that it is determined no new evaluations are warranted to continue eligibility, signatures of agreement/disagreement and rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to a meeting, statement of eligibility for students determined eligible for speech services, IEP meeting participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, observing proposed

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placements, IEPs to parents, notification of nonacademic and extracurricular activities to out-of-district students, preschool transition planning conference, documentation of suspension to case managers, protection of students identified as potentially disabled under the disciplinary requirements, consultation time, team teaching occurring at the middle school level, access to student records and dissemination of information to district personnel regarding pupil record code requirements.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group and/or parent interviews.