

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

**District:** Blairstown Township School District

**County:** Warren

**Monitoring Dates:** April 15,16, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Zola Mills and Michael Lee

### **Background Information:**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Blairstown 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 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 Blairstown Township School District developed an improvement plan to address its identified areas of need.

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

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the school on April 9, 2002. Information obtained 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 and related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sampling 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.

### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for its uplifting family and school-community spirit which is engendered on all levels with emphasis on teamwork, sharing, positive attitude, involvement, the welcome exchange of personal ideas and opinions, and the attention to the growth of the individual – that is, student, parent, teacher and administrator. District personnel pride themselves on the effectiveness of collegial communication and support,

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as well as on the stability created by the longevity in service of staff and administrators. Programs that demonstrate this commitment are:

**QUEST** – which teaches substance abuse prevention as well as problem-solving, decision-making and kindness to all.

**CAP** – which deals with child abuse and neglect.

**'The Kids On The Block'** – presented by the Sussex County Association for Retarded Citizens for third through eight grade students, which deals with disability awareness and sensitivity training.

**The Parents on the Side of Super Education (POSSE)** - is a volunteer parent group that recruits, facilitates and coordinates parent volunteers for assistance within the classroom.

Character education is stressed throughout the district. Each monthly school newsletter contains suggested activities for families to participate in to expand their learning.

The district has attained a Category VI rating by the New Jersey Department of Education indicating it has exceeded state education standards. All special education students participate in the elementary school proficiency assessment (ESPA) and recently they achieved a 99.9% at the partially proficient level, with the majority reaching proficient level.

### **Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**Reevaluation, Transition, and Discipline** 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 a concern in the area of professional/parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

### **Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

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### **Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of speech therapy and counseling, adaptive physical education, transfer students and facilities. The district's improvement plan 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 areas of consent and native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of meetings, written notice, meetings and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site, it was determined that procedures had been put in place and have resulted in the correction of these areas of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, and timelines and participants for identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summaries and hearing and vision screenings for preschool youngsters with disabilities directly referred by parents to the child study team (CST). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

### **Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

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### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized and functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns, in the area of multi-disciplinary, standardized and functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

### **Area of Need:**

**Written Reports** – During the on-site, a review of written reports indicated team members are not dating their reports; they are only identifying the date(s) the assessment was conducted.

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

### **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 a concern with the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of alignment of goals and objectives to core curriculum content standards (CCCS), ninety-

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day timelines, and teacher knowledge/access to the IEP. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, regular education access, Oberti factors, and continuum of options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of supplementary aids/services and nonacademic/extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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, IEP documentation, and approved accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with the alternate assessment. The district's improvement plan needs to be revised to indicate adoption of the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA).

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 waiver, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of case management and collaborative planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of parent/adult student access to records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of student records in the central files.

**Area of Need:**

**Location of Student Records** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined that the district does not identify the locations of other records maintained by the district in the central files.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to ensure central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

**Summary**

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On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Blairstown Township School District on April 15 and 16, 2002. 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with minor revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for their prompt implementation of corrective action to address some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. The district is also 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 of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. One parent expressed an additional concern that the preschool classes did not have current computer access. The Parent Teacher Organization has already voted to purchase the necessary equipment. Another parent expressed the need for a Special Education Parent Group. This is being explored.

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, provision of the related services of occupational and physical, length of school day/year, certifications, obtaining consent, native language, Child Find, referral processes, direct referrals (parent/staff), summer referrals, participants and timelines for identification meeting, multi-disciplinary, functional and standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants at planning meeting, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, regular education access, continuum, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, all discipline procedures, participation in statewide assessment, accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, class size/waiver, age range/waiver, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, access sheets, and the maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, the related services of speech therapy and counseling, transfer students, adaptive physical education, facilities, surrogate parents, notice of meetings, written notice, holding of meetings, independent evaluations, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings for preschool disabled, multidisciplinary, standardized and functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, copies of evaluation reports to parents, goals and objective aligned with core curriculum content standards, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, supplementary aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, alternate assessment, case management/collaboration times, and parent/adult student access

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The on-site visit identified two minor areas of need regarding written reports and documentation of alternate locations of student records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of this 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 required revisions to the improvement plan.