

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

District: Bloomingdale Public School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: March 24 and 25, 2003

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright, Zola Mills and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Bloomingdale Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bloomingdale 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 Bloomingdale 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 Walter T. Bergen Middle School on March 17, 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 is also commended for the "Adopt a Rain Forest" program at the middle school. Each year the middle school adopts a different rain forest for concentrated study.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Transition, Statewide Assessment and Graduation 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 this area. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of transfer students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding speech screenings.

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Area(s) of Need:

Speech Screenings – During the on-site monitoring, staff interviews and record review indicated that following the receipt of referrals from teachers for speech evaluations, speech therapists are conducting screenings to determine the need to evaluate the student.

- **The district will immediately cease conducting screenings of students referred for an initial speech evaluation. Additionally, the district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted with all required participants to review available data and determine the need for an evaluation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

***Section IV:* Location, Referral and Identification**

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and the referral process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site it was determined that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at identification meetings for preschool students.

Area(s) of Need:

Participants at Preschool Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that a general education teacher is not present at any preschool meeting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a general education teacher participates at preschool meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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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 multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessment, functional assessment and bilingual evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that eligibility statements appear in assessment reports developed by related service providers. In addition, record review indicated that although speech therapy reports are signed, they are not dated. As a result, it cannot be determined when these reports were developed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that related service providers do not include eligibility determinations in their individual assessment reports since these determinations may only be made by an appropriately configured team. The plan must further ensure speech therapists date their reports when developed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that although outside evaluations are submitted by parents, there is no mechanism in place to assure the acceptance and/or rejection of these reports or parts of these reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district accepts or rejects whole reports or parts of reports and that the acceptance and/or rejection is noted in the student's file. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 at eligibility meetings for students eligible for speech and language services and statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at eligibility meetings for preschool disabled students (addressed in section IV), statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated a statement of eligibility is not developed for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a statement of eligibility is developed for students eligible for speech and language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Signatures of Agreement or Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district does not discuss or document assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents assenting and dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations. The plan must further ensure any dissenting opinion contains a statement regarding his or her conclusions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines and teacher knowledge and access to IEPs.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation dates and participants at preschool disabled meetings (addressed in Section IV).

Area(s) of Need:

Implementation Dates – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the district is not waiting to provide written notice nor is it obtaining consent to immediate implementation of IEPs. Instead, it is implementing IEPs immediately following meetings whether parents are present at the meeting or not or when parents participate by telephone.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written parental consent is obtained before IEPs are**

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implemented prior to the 15-day notice period expiring. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

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 process, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, regular education access and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding continuum for preschool students.

Area(s) of Need:

Continuum – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the district does not consider general education placement for preschool students in district or in the community. All preschool disabled students are placed in the district's preschool disabled self-contained program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure preschool students have the opportunity to receive educational services with their nondisabled peers. The plan must include a mechanism for the district to establish links to community preschools to ensure a continuum of options. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, documentation to the case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedural safeguards for identified students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class sizes waivers, age ranges waivers, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of locations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of documentation determined the district has implemented specific activities to bring this area into compliance.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding maintenance and destruction of records.

Area of Need:

Maintenance and Destruction of Records – Bloomingdale School District is in a formal sending/receiving relationship with a regional high school district. As such, pupil records are forwarded to the receiving school. During the on-site visit, interviews and record review determined that the district is forwarding all records and is not maintaining those records, in perpetuity, as required by N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.8(e). It was further identified the district is not maintaining records for a five-year period of time as required by N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d). In addition, the district currently does not eliminate any non-educationally relevant records.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure proper maintenance and destruction of records as per N.J.A.C. 6:3. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bloomingdale Public School District on March 24 and 25, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for implementing activities to address some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. Additionally, the district is 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.

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 concerned with the absence of any type of specialized reading program. Several parents expressed concern regarding the provision of additional training for staff working with children with autistic spectrum disorders. Parents also expressed a concern regarding the provision of occupational therapy services since the district's occupational therapist resigned in February. The district is currently in the process of hiring an occupational therapist and will be providing compensatory services to the students.

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, related services, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting participants for students eligible for speech and language services, identification meeting timelines, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation, eligibility meetings, eligibility participants for students eligible for speech and language services, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, considerations and required statements, alignment of goals and objectives to the core curriculum standards, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge and access to IEPs, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, transition, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, statewide assessment, graduation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, parent and adult student access and requests and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, transfer students, surrogate parents, referral process, pre-referral interventions, criteria, copies of evaluation reports to parents, procedural safeguards for discipline, class descriptions and documentation of locations.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding screenings, participants at preschool meetings, written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, statements of eligibility, signature of agreement or disagreement

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with eligibility determinations, IEP implementation dates, preschool continuum and maintenance and destruction of records.

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