

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

District: Bloomsbury School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: February 26, 2004 and March 16, 2004

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray

Background Information:

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

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site record review and phone-interviews 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 Bloomsbury Elementary School on February 19, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the record review, 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. A phone interview was conducted with the district's special education administrator and child study team members.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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.

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Data Summary:

The Bloomsbury School District had a classification rate of 12%, which is slightly below the state average for the 2002-2003 school year. It should be noted that this represents a decrease from a 19.5% classification rate in 1999-2000 school year. 65% of students in the district are educated in general education for more than 80% of the day and the remaining special education students are in general education for 40-80% of the day. Those children that are not educated in the Bloomsbury School District are placed in neighboring school districts, which further provides access to general education.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. It should be noted that training on parental rights in special education was held in December 2003.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. This will ensure the district has a cohesive plan of professional development that is based on identified staff needs and is clearly connected to the provision of educational programs in the district. **The district will revise its improvement plan to include this mechanism.**

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

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, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

Areas of need were identified during the record review regarding goals and objectives for related services and frequency, duration and location of related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives for Related Services - During the record review it was determined that goals and objectives for counseling are not included in the IEP.

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The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that goals and objectives are developed and included in the IEP for all related services. This will ensure that students are afforded the opportunity to receive educational benefit from their special education program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Duration of Speech Services - During the record review it was determined that the duration for speech therapy is identified as a range (e.g. 20-30 minutes), rather than a specific amount of time.

The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the duration of speech therapy sessions are clearly specified in the IEP. This will ensure that parents and staff are made aware of the amount of time a student will receive the related service to further ensure the student is afforded the opportunity to receive the educational benefit from the special education program. The improvement 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 participants at meetings, content of written notice, notices in native language, independent evaluations and surrogate parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notice of an IEP meeting and provision of written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

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, 20-day timelines and participants at identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, referral process, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

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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 bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, development of written reports and signed and dated evaluation reports with regards to students eligible for speech language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, eligibility meeting participants and statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria used to determine eligibility for students eligible for speech language services and documentation of eligibility and copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at meetings, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines and copies of IEPs to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP components, considerations and required statement in IEPs developed for students eligible for speech/language services and teacher responsibility and teacher access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the area of development of an IEP within 30 days of determination of eligibility. The improvement plan submitted by the district identified an increase in referrals as the barrier, but does not include activities to remove the barrier. **The district must revise the improvement plan to include these activities to ensure**

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students who are determined to be eligible for special education and related services receive the services they are entitled to in a timely manner.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, student and agency invitations and agency participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of early intervention to preschool disabled program by age 3.

No areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interviews.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedural safeguards, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plans and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager and suspension tracking. The improvement plan submitted by the district states that case managers will be informed of suspensions in writing when the number of days removed from program reaches ten. This is an inappropriate procedure. **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure case managers receive written notification each time a student is removed from program. This activity will ensure case managers are afforded the opportunity to accurately track removals and to further ensure students are provided with educational services on the 11th day of removal from school.**

An additional area of need was identified during the record review regarding manifestation determination meetings.

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Area(s) of Need:

Manifestation Determination Meetings - During the record review it was determined that current district procedures dictate that a manifestation determination meeting is held “following an interim change in placement that lasts for more than 20 days.” In addition, the procedure states that services will be provided to students only when it has been determined the behavior is a result of a student’s disability.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure manifestation determination meetings are conducted when a removal will constitute a change in placement and that students receive required educational services when they reach the 11th day of removal. These activities will ensure that prior to a change in placement due to a disciplinary action the IEP team meets to determine whether the behavior that resulted in the removal was a manifestation of the student’s disability. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIII: Graduation

The Bloomsbury School District is a k-8 district. Graduation requirements do not apply.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of response to requests for records and access sheets. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the record review or phone interview.

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Summary

The Bloomsbury School District is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with minor revisions will result in systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs through a desk audit, a focus group meeting and parent interviews conducted on February 26, 2004 and March 16, 2004.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed concern regarding communication with child study team members and teachers. Of particular concern to parents was their assertion that child study team members are not employed during the summer. Child study team members stated that they are employed on a per diem basis during the summer and are contacted by administration when their services are required. Many parents stated that they were concerned about the ability of the teacher to implement IEPs and felt that there was insufficient oversight and training to assist teachers. Additionally, parents felt that funding, or lack thereof, directly impacted service to students. Two parents did state that they saw some improvement in the efforts of the child study team regarding communication. Another parent stated that she felt the child study team remained in compliance with the letter of the law, but not always the spirit. Due to the small size of the school many parents expressed reluctance to voice their concerns directly to administration for fear of retribution from child study team members.

The district has a classification rate that has decreased by 5% over the last three years and is now slightly below the state average. All of the classified students in the district are placed in general education for at least 40-80% of the day, with 65% placed in general education for more than 80% of the day.

Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services were determined to be areas compliant with all standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included approved policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day, year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, participants at meetings, content of written notice, notices in native language, independent evaluations, surrogate parents, child find, direct referrals and 20-day timelines, participants at identification meetings, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, 90-day timelines, eligibility meetings, eligibility meeting participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, participants at IEP meetings, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core content curriculum standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, copies of IEPs to parents, early intervention to preschool disabled program by age 3, procedural safeguards, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plans, interim alternative educational setting, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff

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training, parent training, content of notice of an IEP meeting, provision of written notice, pre-referral interventions, referral process, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, consent, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, development of written reports, signed and dated evaluation reports for students eligible for speech language services, criteria used to determine eligibility for students eligible for speech language services, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, components, considerations and required statement in IEPs developed for students eligible for speech/language services, development of an IEP within 30 days of determination of eligibility, teacher responsibility and teacher access, age 14 transition service needs, student and agency invitations, agency participation, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, response to requests for records and access sheets.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives for related services, frequency, duration and location of related services and manifestation determination meetings.

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