

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

District: Boonton School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: May 24 & 25, 2004

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Zola Mills and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Boonton School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Boonton 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 **Boonton 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 Board of Education Annex on May 20, 2004. 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 commended for providing the Bright Beginnings reading program to both general education and special education students. Bright Beginnings is an early intervention program for first grade students who have difficulty learning to read. The program provides a total of two and a half hours of small group instruction per week.

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The district is further commended for implementing the Fast ForWord program. The program utilizes individualized computer exercises as well as speech and language exercises to assist students increase phonemic awareness.

The district also provides a social skills program for elementary age students in grades kindergarten through six. The program helps students develop essential skills for successful social decision-making and problem solving. The goals of the program are to help students respond more effectively in social situations and to support students in becoming more effective listeners.

Data Summary:

The Boonton School District's data reflected a classification rate of 14.7% (excluding students eligible for speech and language services) in the 2002-2003 school year. This number is slightly higher than the state average of 13.9%. The district has indicated the need to revise the referral process in an effort to decrease the number of students who may be inappropriately classified.

During the 2002-2003 school year 40.9 % of classified students ages 6-21 were placed in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. This is comparable to the state average of 41.6%. The data further indicate that 90% of students ages 3-5 are placed in segregated special education early childhood settings because the district has not established links with community based preschool programs, as identified during on-site monitoring. The district will develop a plan to address regular education access for the preschool disabled population.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Free Appropriate Public Education, Discipline, Reevaluation and Student Records 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, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. 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.

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notices, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notices in native language.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of health summaries and vision and hearing screenings.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary, standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, functional assessments, signed and dated written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments for students eligible for speech and language services and acceptance and rejections of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Area of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that speech and language therapists are including eligibility determinations in their evaluation reports. Additionally, the reports are inconsistently dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure individual speech assessments do not include eligibility determinations. The activities must further ensure speech reports are consistently dated. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are made by an appropriately configured team as well as ensuring staff and parents are fully informed of the date a report was developed. The plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding criteria for specific learning disabilities (SLD) and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

Area(s) of Need:

Criteria for SLD – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district has not adopted a formula to determine the existence of a severe discrepancy to establish eligibility under the category of SLD.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to adopt a severe discrepancy formula to ensure the child study team members appropriately apply this formula when making eligibility determinations. Implementation of these activities will ensure only those students who meet eligibility requirements for SLD are classified under those criteria. The plan must include training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Agreement or Disagreement with Eligibility Determinations – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district doesn't allow teachers to document their assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure all district members of the IEP team document assenting and dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations. Implementation of these**

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activities will ensure parents are aware of any disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objections aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility.

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

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 the decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding preschool regular education access in district.

Area(s) of Need:

Regular Education Access for Preschool Disabled Students – During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district does not afford preschool disabled students the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers because they have not established links with community-based programs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district establishes links with community-based preschool programs or develops its own general education preschool program. Implementation of these activities will ensure preschool students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers.**

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency invitation and community resources. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas,

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and placement to pre-school disabled by age three.

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, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of content knowledge. 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 XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding out of district participation and written notice of graduation.

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Area(s) of Need:

Out of District Participation – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that there are no procedures in place to include students in out-of-district placements in graduation activities and ceremonies.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure students in out-of-district placements have the opportunity to participate in graduation activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure these students are afforded the opportunity to participate with their nondisabled peers in extracurricular and nonacademic activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district does not provide written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students are provided with written notice of graduation. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and students are fully informed that graduation is a change in placement that may be challenged through due process. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 age waivers, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area case management time. 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 class size.

Area(s) of Need:

Class Size – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that a number of classes exceeded the required number of students due to lack of sufficient staff.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure class sizes do not exceed those established in code. Implementation of these activities will ensure students have the opportunity to receive educational services in an environment that has been agreed to by the members of the IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the **Boonton School District** on May 24 and 25, 2004. 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 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.

A review of data indicate the district is at the state level for providing services to students aged 6-21 in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. However, because the district has failed to establish links with community based preschool settings, 90% of these students are educated in segregated settings.

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 very pleased with the assistance received from the special services staff. Two parents discussed concerns with teachers at the secondary level being aware and implementing IEP requirements. Additionally, a concern was raised regarding the need for staff to provide more transitional services for students in out of district placements.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, provision of related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meeting and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting and participants, IEP considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, discipline documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, graduation requirements, age range and waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access and request, access sheet, maintenance, destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, surrogate parents policy, notices in native language, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments for students eligible

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for speech and language services, acceptance and rejection of reports, copy of evaluation reports ten days prior to meeting, IEP participants for shared time students, agency invite, community resources, statewide assessment knowledge and case management time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding dated written reports for students eligible for speech and language services, criteria, statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services, signatures of agreement and disagreement, regular education access for preschool, out of district participation, written notice of graduation and class size.

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