

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Bordentown Regional School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: January 6-9, 2004

Monitoring Team: Michael Lee, Jane Marano, and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Bordentown Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bordentown Regional 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 Bordentown Regional 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 Bordentown Regional High School on November 17, 2003. Fifteen parents and three district staff attended the meeting. 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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Bordentown Regional School District is commended for its commitment to facilitating the acceptance of the diversity of its students. The district has district-wide goals addressing diversity. This year's goal was ACCEPT: Appreciation of Culture,

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Color, Ethnicity, Pride, and Tradition. Through these goals all students are valued for their contributions to the district.

Part One Data Summary:

The 2003 data submitted by the Bordentown Regional School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicated that 73.3% students with disabilities ages 3-5 were educated in special education early childhood settings; 16.6% were educated in separate schools (private and public) without general education students, and no students were in general education early childhood settings. During on-site monitoring, the lack of general education opportunities for preschool disabled students was identified as an area of need.

A review of district data for students with disabilities ages 6-21 indicated that 44.6% of students were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. This is slightly above the state average of 41.6%. The number of students placed in separate schools (private and public) has typically been above the state average for the past three years.

The district has identified an area of concern regarding the number of students with disabilities scoring in the proficient range of the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) and the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT). In 2002-2003 only 7.5% of students with disabilities scored proficient on the GEPA and only 6% on the HSPT. The district has addressed these concerns through their improvement plan.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluations, Reevaluations, Eligibility, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Program and Services, 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 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/year, facilities, and staff certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for maintaining hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified a concern regarding procedures for transfer students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure that when a student with disabilities transfers into the district an immediate review of the evaluation information and IEP is conducted by the child study team, the development of an interim IEP, if appropriate, and the immediate placement of the student in an appropriate educational program when records are incomplete or not available. The inclusion of these components will**

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ensure that students who transfer into the district receive appropriate special education programs and services in accordance with their needs.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of related services – goals/objectives and frequency/location/duration for counseling and speech services.

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives for Counseling and Speech Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs do not consistently contain goals and objectives for counseling as a related service and for speech services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs contain goals and objectives for counseling as a related service and for speech services. The implementation of these activities will ensure that therapists have the necessary information regarding therapy needs and the benchmarks against which student progress can be measured. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

IEP Documentation of Location/Frequency/Duration of Counseling and Speech Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs do not consistently identify the location/frequency/duration of counseling services and/or speech therapy services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs identify the location/frequency/duration of counseling services and speech therapy. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed of the extent that students are removed from general education. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for locating/training surrogate parents, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/ reevaluation/release of student records, provision of notice of a meeting, conducting required meetings, provision/content of written notice, and conducting independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notice of a meeting and native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screening - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that when a student is referred to the child study team for a special education evaluation by the parent, hearing and vision screenings are not conducted by the school nurse prior to the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure vision and hearing screening are conducted for all students referred to the child study team for a special education evaluation. Implementation of these activities will ensure the identification team members have the information necessary to assess all areas of suspected disability. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that a general education teacher and the speech-language therapist are not attending identification meetings for preschool age children.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a general education teacher and the speech and language therapist attend identification meetings for preschool aged students. Implementation of these activities will ensure the appropriate participants are in attendance at meetings and are involved in the decision-making process regarding the need for an evaluation. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of IEP meetings, meeting participants, copy of IEP to parents prior to implementation, IEP statements and considerations, teacher responsibility in

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implementing students' IEPs, opportunity to observe proposed placement, and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the development of annual goals/objectives and transfer of rights (age of majority).

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that IEPs do not consistently contain goals and objectives for those areas identified as needing special education instruction.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs contain goals and objectives for special education and related services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that teachers have the necessary information regarding special education needs and the benchmarks against which student progress can be measured. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Transfer of Rights (Age of Majority) – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that transfer of rights is not consistently discussed with parents and students and documented in the IEP at least three years before the student attains the age of majority.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the transfer of rights is discussed with parents and students and documented in the IEP at least three years before the student attains the age of majority. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents have the opportunity to initiate guardianship proceedings in a timely manner. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the documentation of the Oberti considerations, individualized decision-making for students ages 6-21, provision of supplemental aids and services for students ages 6-21, access to general education programs for students ages 6-21, and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding general education access, individualized decision-making, and continuum of services for preschool disabled students.

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Area(s) of Need:

General Education Access/Individualized Decision-Making/Continuum of Programs for Preschool Students with Disabilities - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff, parent input, and a review of records that the only program option considered at IEP meetings for preschool disabled students is the preschool disabled program. A review of data in Section One indicated that no students were placed in general education preschool programs in 2003.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure general education placements with appropriate supports and services is the first option considered for students ages 3-5. The plan must include in-service training for the child study team members to ensure they have an understanding of the LRE requirements as well as knowledge of supports and services that can be provided to successfully educate preschool students with disabilities in general education settings. Additionally, the plan must include a mechanism to ensure the district establishes links with community-based preschool settings. Implementation of these activities will ensure preschool students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student/agency invitation to transition planning meeting, and determination of student interests and preferences,

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 16 statement of needed transition services (community experiences/development of employment or post-school living objectives), and securing the participation of agency representatives at transition planning meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study/age 14 or younger and statement of needed transition services/age 16.

Area(s) of Need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff, parent input, and a review of records that the district does not consistently include courses of study relevant to the transition service needs under the applicable parts of the student's IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that statement of the transition services needs includes considerations and documentation of appropriate courses of study that are relevant to the student's interests and preferences and ability. Implementation of these**

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activities will ensure that proposed courses of study afford the student the opportunity to achieve successful post-secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.

Age 16 Needed Transition Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and a review of records for students who are at least 16 years of age that IEPs do not consistently contain an appropriately developed transition plan with required components – interagency linkages, instruction, related services, activities, goals, and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that transition plans are developed appropriately and contain the necessary components. Implementation of these activities will ensure plans are developed to afford students the opportunity to achieve their post-secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in early intervention to preschool transition planning conferences, and implementation of IEP for preschool disabled students no later than third birthday.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bordentown Regional School District on January 6-9, 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 district data indicated that although the district is providing services to students ages 6-21 in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, there is a lack of general education opportunities for preschool disabled students. All preschool disabled students are educated in segregated settings.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, fifteen (15) parents and three (3) district personnel attended. Parents expressed concerns regarding availability of case managers, high caseloads for case managers, communication between parents and case managers, provision of extended school year services, out of district placements, preschool, and access to extra curricular and nonacademic activities for students in out of district placements. Parents liked that students were invited to meetings and expressed satisfaction with classroom teaching assistants.

General Provisions, Evaluations, Reevaluations, Eligibility, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Program and Services, 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.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, facilities, staff certification, procedures for locating/training surrogate parents, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/reevaluation/release of student records, provision of notice of a meeting, conducting required meetings, provision/content of written notice, conducting independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, provision of IEP meetings, meeting participants, copy of IEP to parents prior to implementation, IEP statements and considerations, teacher responsibility in implementing students' IEPs, opportunity to observe proposed placement, annual review timelines, Oberti considerations, individualized decision-making for students ages 6-21, provision of supplemental aids and services for students ages 6-21, access to general education programs for students ages 6-21, student/agency invitation to transition planning meeting, determination of student interests and preferences, participation in early intervention to preschool transition planning conferences, and implementation of IEP for preschool disabled students no later than third birthday.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding procedures for maintaining hearing aids, procedures for transfer students, content of notice of a meeting, native language, identification meeting timelines, 90-day timelines, age 16 statement of needed transition services (community experiences/development of

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employment or post-school living objectives), and securing the participation of agency representatives at transition planning meetings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals/objectives and frequency/location/duration for counseling and speech services, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, development of annual goals/objectives for special education subjects, transfer of rights (age of majority), general education access/individualized decision-making/continuum of services for preschool disabled students, courses of study/age 14 or younger, and statement of needed transition services/age 16.

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