

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

**District:** Bridgeton School District

**County:** Cumberland

**Monitoring Dates:** January 7, 8, 9, 10, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Kenneth Richards, Barbara Ciancaglini, Patricia Fair, and Arlene Popovici

### **Background Information**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Bridgeton School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Bridgeton 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 Bridgeton School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the 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 Bridgeton Middle School on January 3, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting 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, 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, and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district should be commended for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the ExCel (Extra Commitment Enhances Learning) alternative middle school program that challenges students to go beyond the expectations of a traditional middle school program. The district also supports the involvement of students with disabilities in the

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Health Occupations Students of America Association. This association assists students in meeting the needs of the health care community by providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills related to health care occupations.

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

**Statewide Assessment** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

#### **I. General Provisions**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of policies and procedures.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development and dissemination of IDEA information. The improvement plan for professional development is not sufficient because it lacks procedures, training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The improvement plan for dissemination of IDEA information is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

#### **II. F.A.P.E.**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of Extended School Year (ESY), related services, length of school day/transportation for students placed in out-of-district programs, transfer students and adaptive physical education (APE). The improvement plans submitted by the district in the areas of ESY and APE are not sufficient because they lack procedures, in-service training and administrative oversight component to bring about required change. These plans must be revised to include these elements. The improvement plan submitted in the area of length of school day/transportation for students placed in out-of-district programs lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan will be revised to include this component. The district did not submit improvement plans in the areas of transfer students and documentation of related service goals and short-term objectives/benchmarks. The plan needs to be revised to

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include procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding related services.

### **Area of Need:**

**Related Services** - During the on-site visit, record review and information obtained during staff interviews determined that the provision of related services was not provided in accordance with IEPs. Scheduling conflicts and attendance at meetings by staff were identified as reasons.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure related services are provided in accordance with IEP requirements. The plan must include a mechanism to address the barriers identified by staff. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

### **III. Procedural Safeguards**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of meetings, written notice, response to parental requests and implementing action for which consent was provided. The improvement plans submitted in the areas of surrogate parents, written notice and notices of meetings are not sufficient because they lack procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about required change. The plans need to be revised to include these elements. The improvement plan submitted to address the area regarding parental requests is not sufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The improvement plan submitted in the area of implementing action for which consent was obtained is sufficient to address the area of concern.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings and consent.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Notice of Meetings** – During the on-site visit, review of notice of meeting documents determined that parents are not informed that at the discretion of the parent or school district, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel, may be invited to attend meetings.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure current notices of meetings include language to inform the parent that at the discretion of the parent or school district, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel, may be invited to attend the meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Consent** – During the on-site visit, record review and information obtained during staff interviews determined that the district does not consistently make efforts to obtain consent prior to reevaluation when additional assessments are required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include to ensure efforts are made to obtain consent prior to conducting additional assessments as part of the reevaluation process and that these efforts are documented in student records. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

#### **IV. Location, Referral, Identification**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of health summary and summer referrals,

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities and the referral process. The improvement plan submitted in the area of the referral process is not sufficient because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district did not submit an improvement plan in the area of child find. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding direct referral, vision and hearing screenings, ID meeting timelines and participants.

##### **Areas of Need:**

**Direct Referrals** – During the on-site visit, information obtained during interviews conducted with staff determined that staff cannot make a direct referral to the child study team. All referrals must go through the student resource committee.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that staff have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without**

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**delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure building administrators comply with the full implementation of these activities. It is recommended that the district provide staff development training regarding the direct referral process.**

**Vision/Hearing Screenings** – During the on-site visit, record review determined that vision and hearing screenings are not consistently conducted prior to identification meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure vision and hearing screenings are conducted and provided to the child study team prior to the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Identification Meetings and Participants** – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews with staff determined that identification meetings are not consistently conducted within 20 days of a referral to the child study team. In addition, as a result of scheduling conflicts, regular education teachers do not consistently attend identification meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted within required timelines and regular education teachers are in attendance at the meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

### **V. Evaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessment, written reports and acceptance and rejection of reports. The improvement plans submitted in the areas of functional assessments, acceptance/rejection of reports and written reports are not sufficient because they lack an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

### **Area of Need:**

**Written Reports** – During the on-site visit, review of written reports determined that reports do not include the signature of the evaluator.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure written reports document the signature of the evaluator. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

## **VI. Reevaluation**

### **Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and turning age five.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding timelines and participants.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Timelines** – During the on-site visit, information obtained during staff interviews determined that three-year reevaluation timelines are not consistently met.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure reevaluations are conducted within three years of the previous classification or sooner if warranted. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Participants** – During the on-site visit, record review determined that staff identified in the notice of meetings do not consistently attend reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff identified in the notice of meeting are in attendance at these meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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**VII. Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and providing parents with a copy of evaluation reports. The improvement plan submitted in the area evaluation reports to parents is not sufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan submitted in the area of criteria is not sufficient because it lacks an in-service component. The plans need to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**VIII. IEP**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives/CCCS and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 90-day timelines, implementation dates, age of majority, considerations and required statements, vocational school participation, documenting attempts to secure agency participation, participants, providing a copy of the IEP to the adult student, documenting progress in goals and objectives, teacher knowledge/access, transition from elementary to secondary programs and documenting the amount of instructional time the in-class resource room teacher is present in the class. The improvement plans submitted in the areas of age of majority, 90 day timelines, participants, vocational school participation, implementation dates and teacher access/knowledge are not sufficient because they lack procedures, in-service training and administrative oversight that will bring about required change. The plans will be revised to include these elements. The improvement plans are not sufficient because they lack appropriate procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**IX. Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of supplemental aids and services.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The improvement plan submitted in the area of non-academic/extra curricular participation is not sufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regard individual decision-making, regular education access and continuum.

### **Area of Need:**

**Regular Education Access/Decision-Making and Continuum** – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that access to regular education programs is restricted to programs currently available in the district. Additionally, students attending Washington Ave. are denied access to programs outside the self-contained facility they attend.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure placement decisions are based on the individual needs of students and not on the availability of current program options. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

## **X. Transition**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference, EIP to PSD by age three and identifying courses in the statement of transition service needs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency involvement, transition service needs, and needed transition services. The improvement plans are not sufficient because they lack procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding agency invitation

### **Area of Need:**

**Agency Invitation** – During the on-site visit record review determined that agencies identified as having responsibility in transition services do not consistently attend meetings when transition is discussed. Additionally, the district does not consistently document invitations or multiple efforts to obtain agency participation.



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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure agencies identified as having responsibility for student transition activities are invited to attend meetings where transition will be discussed. The plan must include a mechanism to document the invitation as well as the multiple attempts to obtain agency participation. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

### **XI. Discipline**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, manifestation determinations, Interim Alternative Educational Settings (IAES), and protection of students identified as potentially disabled. The district has submitted improvement plans that are not sufficient because they lack procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

### **XIII. Graduation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma, participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Written notice** – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews with staff determined that the district does not provide written notice that graduation is a change in placement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure written notice of graduation is provided to parents and adult students prior to graduation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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**XIV. Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, group size/ST and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of programs descriptions. The district has submitted an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding common planning time and home instruction approval.

**Areas of Need:**

**Common Planning Time** – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff determined that special education and regular education teachers do not have common planning time.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure special education and regular education teachers have common planning time. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Home Instruction Approvals** - Information provided by the county supervisor of child study and on-site review of information provided by the district determined that approvals for home instruction were not consistently submitted to the county office prior to program implementation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district submits and receives approval from the county office prior to implementing a program of home instruction.**

**XV. Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent access. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of location of records.

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**Area of Need:**

**Documentation of location of records** - During the on-site visit review of records identified that the location of other student records maintained by the district is not documented in the central files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the location of other student records maintained by the district is documented in central files.**

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### **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Bridgeton School District on January 7, 8, 9 & 10, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, the four parents who attended the meeting expressed their satisfaction with the Child Study Team and the transition from Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Disabled Programs by age three. Parents also commended the district for their efforts to provide translators at meetings when necessary. Concerns were expressed regarding regular education access, the need for additional bi-lingual programs and more consistency in providing notice of meetings. Many of the concerns raised by the parents had already been addressed by the district during self-assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included statewide assessment, policies and procedures, facilities, certifications, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, health summary, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, turning age five, documentation of eligibility, eligibility meetings, goals and objectives/CCCS, annual review timelines, the provision of supplemental aides and services, preschool transition planning conference, EIP to PSD by age three, identifying courses in the statement of transition service needs, discipline procedure, documentation of graduation requirements in the IEP, diploma, participation, class size, age range, group size/ST, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of Extended School Year (ESY), related services, length of school day, transfer students, adaptive physical education (APE), surrogate parents, notice of meetings, written notice, response to parental requests, implementing action for which consent was provided, child find activities and referral process, functional assessment, written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, criteria, providing parents with a copy of evaluation reports, 90 day timelines, implementation dates, age of majority, consideration and required statements, vocational school participation, documenting attempts to secure agency participation, participants, providing a copy of the IEP to the adult student, documenting progress of goals and objectives, teacher knowledge/access, transition from elementary to secondary programs and documenting the amount of instructional time the in class resource room teacher is present in the class support, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, agency involvement, transition service needs, consideration of technical support, documenting interests and preferences, identification of post secondary liaison and needed transition services, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, Behavior Improvement Plans, manifestation determinations, Interim Alternative

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Educational Settings (IAES), suspension tracking, protection of students identified as potentially disabled, programs descriptions, and parent access.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding related services, notice of meetings, consent, direct referral, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, ID meeting timelines, participants, written reports, reevaluation timelines and participants, participants at eligibility meetings, implementing programs identified in IEPs, continuum, individual decision making, regular education access, agency invitation, written notice of graduation, common planning time, home instruction approval, and documentation of location of records.

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

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