

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Brooklawn Public School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: February 10, 2005

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Patricia Fair

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Brooklawn 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 Brooklawn Public School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Brooklawn Public School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site desk audit 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 Alice Costello School, on February 10, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a comprehensive desk audit, including a review of a representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, other relevant information. Additional parent interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviews were conducted with the current Principal/Director of Special Services and the new Coordinator of the Child Study Team, as well as Child Study Team members, the speech-language specialist, and a special education teacher. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, warranting only minor revision, which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

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District Strengths:

The district provides a social language group, in which special education and general education teens meet to resolve their social problems and concerns, through conflict resolutions. The teen group is facilitated by the Child Study Team.

The district offers a peer mediation group where the principal trains 7th and 8th grade special education and general education students in peer mediation. As conflicts arise, students are offered the opportunity to meet with the peer mediators and a staff member.

Data Summary:

The district's data indicated a classification rate of 14.2% (49 of 345 students) in 2003, which is commensurate with the 14.35% state average. The district's data also indicated that the percentage of students in general education less than 40% of the school day has decreased over the past three years, generating an increase in students in general education between 40% and 80% of the school day. The district is making many efforts to educate students in general education classes. The district continues to provide staff development to assist in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Statewide Assessment, Graduation, 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 indicated compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and staff development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 indicated compliance in the areas of provision of extended school year, provision of related services except speech therapy, length of school day and year, transfer procedures for students eligible for special education and related services, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of extended school year, and transfer procedures for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address

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these issues. Although the district initially identified provision of speech therapy and hearing aids procedure as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings, written notice for students eligible for special education and related services, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of attempts to secure parental participation, written notice for students eligible for speech and language services, and notices in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. Although the district initially identified the provision of the current New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14 and due process hearing rules as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting.

Area of Need:

Notice of a Meeting—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that notice of a meeting does not consistently and correctly identify the purpose of the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of a meeting to the parent correctly identifies the purpose of the meeting. Implementation of this activity will ensure that parents are fully informed in advance as to the purpose of the meeting. The district is advised to refer to the state sample forms available at www.state.nj.us/education as a reference.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, prereferral interventions, direct staff referrals, summer referrals, and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of direct parent referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification

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meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports for students evaluated for special education and related services, and bilingual evaluations.

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

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of timelines for students eligible for special education and related services, planning meetings, participants, and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria for special education and related services, statement of eligibility, and evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to an eligibility meeting for students considered for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services, criteria for students eligible for speech and language services, signature of agreement/disagreement rationale, statement of eligibility for students classified as specific learning disabled, and evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. Although the district initially identified signature of agreement/disagreement rationale and statement of eligibility as

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areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has brought about correction in these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of meetings, Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP), goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual reviews, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, required components of the IEP, annual reviews, and IEP implementation dates. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of decision-making process, supplementary aids and services, general education access, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of LRE documentation and considerations. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of student and agency invitation, age 16 needed transition services, and preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of age 14 transition service needs. 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention programs to preschool disabled programs by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notification to the case manager.

Area of Need:

Notification of Suspensions to the Case Manager—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the case manager is not consistently notified in writing of suspensions of classified students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the case manager is consistently notified in writing of suspensions of classified students. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students that have been suspended or expelled continue to receive a free and appropriate public education. The district's improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, and common planning time.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of personnel, specifically, child study team coordinator and speech and language specialist. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has brought about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified.

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the Brooklawn Public School District on February 10, 2005. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 exceptionally 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 minor revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were 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 special education data indicated that through staff workshops the district has increased the number of students placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day, although the percentage of students with disabilities has risen slightly since 2001. The district is working toward increasing the number of students with disabilities educated within the district.

Parents and staff expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services at a public focus group meeting conducted by the monitoring team. Brooklawn Public School District is a choice school, and parents expressed their extreme satisfaction with their decision to place their children in this district. Staff members were complimented on their communication with parents, as well as their expertise and professionalism.

Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Student Records were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

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, provision of programs and related services except for speech therapy, length of school day and year, transfer procedures for students eligible for special education and related services, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find ages 3-21, the referral process, prereferral interventions, direct staff referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports for students evaluated for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings, participants, reevaluations for students turning age five, eligibility meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, participants, criteria for students eligible for special education and related services, IEP meetings, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access, 90-day timelines, individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, general education access, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum, student and agency invitation, age 16 needed transition services, preferences and interests, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention programs to preschool

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disabled programs by age three, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, and common planning time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent and professional development, documentation of extended school year, transfer procedures for students eligible for speech and language services, attempts to secure parental participation, written notice, notice in native language, direct parent referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments, functional assessments, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meetings for students evaluated for speech and language services, criteria for students eligible for speech and language services, IEP participants, IEP components, implementation dates, and age 14 transition service needs.

The focus group meeting and comprehensive desk audit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notice of a meeting and notification of suspensions to case manager.

The district was able to demonstrate correction in specific areas prior to the on-site desk audit, including provision of speech therapy, hearing aides, provision of New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14 and Due Process Code 1:6A, identification meeting participants, written reports for students evaluated for speech and language services, signature of agreement/disagreement rationale, statement of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to eligibility meeting, documentation of decisions regarding least restrictive environment, and personnel.

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