

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

District: Burlington City School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: May 16 and 17, 2005

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Kenneth Richards and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Burlington City School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Burlington City School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Burlington City 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 monitoring activities, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Burlington City High School on the evening of April 27, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the on-site monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the OSEP team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education director, principals, child study team, general education and special education teachers, and related services providers.

District Strengths:

The Burlington City School District is commended for providing a number of innovative programs designed to enhance student academic achievement, including the Internet Café, Distance Learning Center, web-based Odyssey program for families, and full day preschool programs for all preschool students. The district has received funding through the Local Capacity Building Grant for the New Jersey Department of Education. Funds from this grant have enabled the district to increase the number of in-class resource programs from two to eleven.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Data Summary:

The Burlington City School District data indicate that 19.3% of the student population is classified as eligible for special education and related services. Though this is significantly higher than the state average of 14.6%, it should be noted that it is lower than the district's 2004 rate of 22%. The district has identified concerns regarding the overrepresentation of minority students in special education.

With regard to placement, 45.4% of students receiving special education, ages 6-21, are educated in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day (the state average is 41.9%) and 72.7% of classified students ages 3-5 are in general education early childhood settings. The district indicated that this positive trend results from activities implemented through the Capacity Building Grant and Abbott regulations.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Program and Services, and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the 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 oversight of IEP implementation, documentation of frequency, location and duration of related services, length of school day, transfer students, facilities and certification.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of extended school year services, and provision of related services, and goals and objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, provision of notice of a meeting, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notice of a meeting, content and provision of written notice, and scheduling of meetings at mutually agreeable time and place. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at meetings.

Areas of Need:

Participants at Meetings - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that general education teachers consistently do not attend meetings (identification meetings, eligibility meetings, IEP meetings, IEP revisions meetings, IEP annual reviews, and reevaluation meetings).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required participants attend meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure information is obtained from all required participants and that the decision-making process includes input from each participant.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district also identified concerns regarding the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The district will continue to receive technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Civil Rights regarding improvement plan activities.

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 multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports, and written reports.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of use of evaluation procedures that are not racially discriminatory. 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 components of functional assessment for students classified as eligible for special education and related services and for students classified as eligible for speech and language services.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of Need:

Components of a Functional Assessment - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that child study team members and the speech language specialist do not include all the required components of a functional assessment in their evaluation reports. While in the majority of cases the parent interview was missing, teacher interview and teacher input, and observation in a non-testing situation were also excluded from the report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure evaluators include all required components of a functional assessment in their evaluation reports. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on all required data obtained through the assessment process.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting, criteria, and statement of eligibility.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to eligibility meeting, and documentation of agreement/disagreement and rationale for eligibility determination. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, and teachers having knowledge of and access to IEPs.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP components, specifically goals and objectives. 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs by age three.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests survey, age 16 needed transition services and student invitation to IEP meetings.

During self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding outside agency involvement with transition services. 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 XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment (FBA), behavioral intervention plans (BIP), interim alternative educational settings (IAES), and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of notification of removal to case manager. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this activity.**

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Burlington City School District on May 16 & 17, 2005. 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Seventeen parents and district staff attended a public focus group meeting on April 27, 2005. Concerns were raised regarding extended school year services, provision of related services, discipline procedures, and need for parent support group. Many of the issues addressed during the focus group meeting have been addressed in the district's improvement plan. In addition, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services.

A review of data indicated that the Burlington City School District's classification rate of students requiring special education and related services is above the state average. The district has identified concerns regarding the overrepresentation of minority students in special education and will continue to receive technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Civil Rights regarding improvement plan activities. In addition, 45.4% of classified students, ages 6-21, are in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day and 72.7% of classified students ages 3-5 are in general education early childhood settings.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit by the Office of Special Education Programs included General Provision, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Program and Services, and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included oversight of IEP implementation, documentation of frequency, location, duration of related services, length of school day, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parent, consent, provision of notice of a meeting, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports, written reports, eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, teachers having knowledge of and access to IEPs, preschool transition planning conferences, implementation of IEPs by age three, age 14 transition service needs, determination of students preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, student invitation to IEP meetings, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment (FBA), behavioral intervention plans (BIP), interim alternative educational settings (IAES), and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding consideration of extended school year services, provision of related services, goals and

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

objectives for related services, content of notice of a meeting, content and provision of written notice, scheduling meetings, pre-referral interventions, non-discriminatory evaluation procedures, provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to eligibility meeting, documentation of agreement or disagreement and rationale for eligibility determination, IEP goals and objectives, outside agency involvement with transition services, and discipline notification of removal to case manager.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding participants at meetings, and components of functional assessment.

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