

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Burlington Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: March 24, 25, 26, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Michael Lee, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Burlington Township 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 Township 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 Burlington Township 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 Burlington Township High School on March 17, 2003. 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for providing a school corporation partnership with General Electric for both regular and special education students at the high school, a supervised school – to – work program available to selected special education students at the high school.

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Area(s) 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.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant 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 staff training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs, length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff and parents indicated extended school year is not considered for all students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is considered for all students and provided when it is determined to be necessary to address student needs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Goals and Objectives for Counseling - During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that IEPs did not contain goals and objectives for counseling that is being provided as a related service.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the development of appropriate goals and objectives for counseling and the inclusion of these goals and objectives into IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notices.

Area(s) of Need:

Notices – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that although the district has revised their forms to include all the required components, their notice of a meeting form is missing the statement which informs parents of their right to invite others with expertise. Additionally, it was determined that child study members are not consistently using the newly revised notice forms. Furthermore, though team members indicated they sent notices of meetings and provided written notice, a review of records indicated no documentation to support those statements. At the public focus group meeting, parents reported they do not receive notices and sometimes received notices of meetings after the meetings were conducted.

- **The district will revise its notice of a meeting form to ensure it contains all required statements. The improvement plan must be revised to include procedures to ensure appropriate notice forms are used consistently and that notices are provided to parents to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in meetings and to consider any proposed changes recommended by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals and identification meetings timelines.

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

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Area(s) of Need:

Participants – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interview with staff indicated that regular education teachers and the full child study team are not consistently present at identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure required participants are present at identification meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance and rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that functional assessments do not always include a parent interview. Functional assessments for students placed in out-of-district programs do not always include teacher interviews and classroom observations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments include parent and teacher interviews, and classroom observations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of three-year timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding change in eligibility.

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Area(s) of Need:

Change in Eligibility – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that a reevaluation is not consistently conducted when there is a change in eligibility.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a reevaluation planning meeting is conducted to review data and determine the need for additional assessments when a change in eligibility is being considered. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, and copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signature of agreement/disagreement rationale.

Area(s) of Need:

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement Rationale – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the eligibility team members are not consistently documenting their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that eligibility team members document their agreement and/or disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives linked to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, and IEP access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meetings and participants. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district also identified concerns in the area of teacher responsibility for IEP implementation. **The district's improvement plan is**

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insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP revisions, considerations and required statements, frequency, location and duration, and program placement.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Revisions – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated the district does not consistently convene an IEP meeting prior to making changes in a student's program

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs are revised prior to making changes in student programs and that the parent/adult student is provided with written notice of the proposed changes. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Considerations and Required Statements – During the on-site monitoring a review of records indicated that although all considerations and required statements are included in the IEPs, team members are not including required information to address these areas. Instead, these sections were blank or incomplete.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure team members complete all required sections in IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Implementation Dates – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with parents indicated that parents are not receiving IEPs prior to implementation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents receive copies of IEPs prior to implementation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Frequency, Location, Duration – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that IEPs do not consistently contain frequency, location and duration of related services nor do they identify whether the resource center program is replacement or support.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs indicate frequency, duration and location of related services and identify resource center programs as replacement or support. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Program Placement – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the program identified in the IEP does not match the placement of the student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure every student receives the services he or she is required to receive in accordance with IEPs. The plan must include a mechanism to provide compensatory services for those services students did not receive during this school year. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services and regular education access for school aged students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum. The district identified a barrier that preschool disabled students are housed in segregated settings without any access to general education students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Oberti (addressed in Section VIII), and notification of nonacademic and extracurricular activities to out-of-district students.

Area(s) of Need:

Notification of Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that parents of students placed in out-of-district programs are not being notified of extracurricular activities offered within the district. As a result, these students do not have the opportunity to participate in any of these activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents of students placed out-of-district are notified of the district's extracurricular activities. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, documentation of courses of study and preferences and interests, and age 16 needed transition services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to**

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ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age three.

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 procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans/functional behavior assessments, and manifestation determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, interim alternative educational setting, and request for evaluations without undue delay. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 areas of diploma and participation,

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

Area(s) of Need:

Graduation Requirements - During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the IEPs for students who turn 14 do not consistently include a statement of graduation requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs for students who turn 14 during the time that IEP is in effect includes graduation requirements. The plan must include an administrative**

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oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Written Notice of Graduation – During on-site monitoring, a review of records determined that written notice of graduation is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided. 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 class size, age range, and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of home instruction approvals. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district also identified concerns in the area of child study team personnel. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance, destruction, and documentation of locations of other records.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Burlington Township School District on March 24, 25, 26, 2003. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their concerns regarding communication with staff, delay in the provision of services identified in IEPs, staff knowledge of IEPs and parents feeling that they are not a part of the IEP decision-making process.

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, length of school day and year, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, native language, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, meetings, criteria, documentation of eligibility, goals and objectives aligned with core curricular content standards, age of majority, timelines, individualized decision-making, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services and regular education access, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disable program by age three, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans/functional behavior assessments, manifestation determinations, statewide assessment, class size, age range group size for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, transfer students, facilities, three-year reevaluation timelines, IEP participants, teacher knowledge/access, continuum of programs and services, student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, documentation of courses of study and preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, documentation of case manager, interim alternative educational setting, requests for evaluations without undue delay, home instruction approvals, and personnel.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, notice of a meeting, written notice, meetings, participants, functional assessments, change in eligibility, certification of agreement/disagreement rationale, IEP revisions, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, implementation dates, frequency, location, duration, program placement, Oberti factors, notification of nonacademic and extracurricular activities, graduation requirements and written notice of graduation.

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

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