

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Byram School District

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: November 13, 14 and 15, 2001

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills, Thomas Walsh and Theresa Schifffenhaus

Background Information

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Byram School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Byram 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 Byram 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 Byram Intermediate School on October 30, 2001. 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 its Summer Reading (and Physical Education) Program for special education students. It is further noted the district has successfully included homebound students in a variety of school activities. The district also provides an opportunity to all students to participate in Project Adventure. Project Adventure is an outdoor enrichment program open to all students that is designed to build self-esteem.

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The district should also be commended for the successful launching of a special education parents group.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Discipline, Graduation, Statewide Assessment 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.

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services, length of day/year, facilities and certifications.

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

Areas of Need:

Transfer Students - Although there is a district policy regarding transfer students, it does not result in the immediate review and placement of students when the sending district fails to respond to requests for records.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure transfer students are appropriately placed in programs even when the sending district fails to respond to requests for records.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Areas of Need:

Written Notice – Though team members discuss and review available data to determine whether students require an initial evaluation as well as participate in an appropriate process to determine the nature and scope of the evaluation, the district does not document this process.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure they maintain documentation of the process team members follow when a determination is made that an evaluation is or is not warranted.**

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referrals, health summaries, summer referrals, vision & hearing screenings, identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Child Find activities for preschool students. An improvement plan activity was not submitted to address this need. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures to bring about the required changes.

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

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of reports to parents and eligibility criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding meeting participants. The district has already addressed this need by hiring and training additional staff.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines and teacher knowledge/access to the IEP.

During self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of required considerations and statements and alignment of goals and objectives with core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns. During the self-assessment process the district further identified a concern regarding the provision of the IEP to parents prior to its implementation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these elements.

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IX. LRE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti considerations, required considerations, and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

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

Area of Need:

Continuum of Placement – During the on-site visit it was determined the district does not offer an in-class support program. Interviews and a review of IEPs indicated that when a student requires in-class support, an aide sometimes accompanied those students to the regular classroom during that particular subject.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it provides programs and services required by IEPs. The plan must also include a component to ensure the district identifies its program and service needs and then provides the necessary staff.**

X. Transition (Preschool/Post-School)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding attendance at preschool transition planning conferences, evaluations, placement in program by the third birthday, student/agency invitations, and agency involvement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of career awareness, exploration, and preparation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, speech group sizes, and home instructions.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of allocation of time for case management responsibilities. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an oversight component to

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ensure the consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Byram School District on November 13-15, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Some parents indicated concerns regarding curricular and grading policies of the district.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included the general provisions, extended school year, related services, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, native language, independent evaluations, referral process, health summaries, vision & hearing screenings, participation at identification meetings, evaluations, reevaluations, criteria, provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP timelines, teacher knowledge/access to IEP, Oberti considerations, considerations and documentation, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, preschool transition services, student /agency invitations, agency involvement, discipline procedures, statewide assessment, graduation, class size, age range, speech group sizes, home instruction, and student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need including, Child Find activities, participants at eligibility and IEP meetings, inclusion of required considerations and statements, alignment of goals/objectives with core curriculum content standards, provision of IEP prior to implementation, career awareness, exploration and preparation, and allocation of time for case management.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding transfer students, written notices, documentation of eligibility, and the continuum of placement.

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.