

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

District: Franklin Borough School District

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: November 22 and 23, 2004

Monitoring Team: Carol Raff, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the **Franklin Borough School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Franklin Borough 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 **Franklin Borough 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 **Franklin Borough School**, on October 21, 2004. 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

Franklin Borough has been the proud recipient of four Best Practices awards granted by the State of New Jersey. Their preschool disabilities program provides an integrated model for speech and occupational therapy and has a parent's night which provides dinner and a workshop. The district also developed a program entitled 'Student Safety

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Patrol' whereby all students earn positions similar to military ranks based upon performance of duties. Additionally, the 'Rewind Theatre' is a unique social skills program in which students role play social problems and then 'rewind' the act with a more positive outcome. The 'Positive Adolescent Leaders of Sussex County' (PALS) program enables students to participate in leadership conferences and encourages students to apply learned skills within the school setting.

Data Summary:

The Franklin Borough School District reported a classification rate of 17.24% for the 2003 school year which is approximately 5% higher than the state average for that year. However, this rate represents a 1.8% decrease from 2002. The district has expanded the use of prereferral interventions within general education to bring this rate within the state average. The percentage of students with disabilities in general education for more than 80% of the school day was 54.7% which is above the state average of 41.6% for 2003. The percentage of students with disabilities in general education between 40% and 80% of the school day was 16.1% which is well below the state average of 30.3%. Additionally, the percentage of students with disabilities in general education for less than 40% of the day was 27.7% which is higher than the state average of 17.3%. The district attributes this to the fact that they are returning out-of-district students to programs within the district. This is reflected in the data indicating that the rate of students placed in separate settings is approximately 7% lower than the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Free Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Individualized Education Plan, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records were all 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 IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of child find, referral process, direct referrals, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

Additional areas of need identified during the on-site visit were health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

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Area(s) of Need:

Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that vision and hearing screenings and health summaries are not being reviewed and signed off by the school nurse.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the school nurse summarizes all available health or medical information and conducts vision and hearing screenings for every student referred to the child study team for evaluation. The implementation of these activities will ensure the team has this information prior to the evaluation planning meeting to assist them in identifying suspected areas of disabilities and to assist them in determining assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessment, written reports signed, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports.

No areas of need were identified during the monitoring visit.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, and provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments and functional assessments for students eligible for speech language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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 **Franklin Borough School District** on November 22 and 23, 2004. 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 satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A majority of the parents praised the district for enabling their children to have access to placements in the least restrictive environment. The parents also indicated that there are no known administrative barriers and in fact the school offers an 'extreme willingness' to personalize services for their children. Overall, the district's child study team, teachers and administrators were viewed as being positive, helpful and encouraging.

The Franklin Borough School District reports a classification rate of 17.24% for the 2003 school year which is somewhat higher than the state average. The district has expanded the use of pre-referral interventions within general education to bring this rate within the state average. The percentage of students with disabilities in general education for more than 80% of the school day was 54.7% which is above the state average of 41.6% for 2003. The percentage of students with disabilities in general education is between 40% and 80% of the school day was 16.1% which is well below the state average of 30.3%. Additionally, the percentage of students with disabilities in general education for less than 40% of the day was 27.7% which is higher than the state average of 17.3%. The district attributes this to the fact that they are returning students educated out-of-district to programs within the district. This is reflected in the data that indicate a rate of students placed in separate settings approximately 7% lower than the state average.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings content and provision, written notices content and provision, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, child find, referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, three year timelines, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool, eligibility meeting and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review

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timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, notification and participation of out-of-district nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, pre school transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, age fourteen transition service needs, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral improvement plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, IEP requirements, out-of-district participation, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access and request of student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding pre-referral interventions, standardized assessments and functional assessments for students eligible for speech-language services.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding health summary, vision and hearing screenings.

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