

New Jersey State Department of Education
Special Education Monitoring

District: New Brunswick School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: October 22, 23, 2001

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Background Information

During the 2000-2001 school year, the New Brunswick School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the New Brunswick 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 New Brunswick 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 on October 17, 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.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required statements of assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

An area of need was identified through staff and parent interviews during the on-site monitoring visit regarding staff development. It was determined that in-service training was needed for administrators, child study team members, regular education teachers and special education teachers regarding special education code requirements, least restrictive environment, behavioral interventions, in-class support programs and transition.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Development - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that there is a need for in-service training for district personnel in the areas identified above.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that in-service training is provided to all staff members in the areas identified during the on-site. The improvement plan must also include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of all staff training.**

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school year and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding educational opportunities, length of school day, extended school year, goals/objectives for related services, documentation of related services that include frequency, duration and location, provision of related services as per IEPs, and transfer procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service 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 regarding the limited availability of space to provided instructional services to classified students in buildings that provide access to nondisabled students. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because the procedures do not address how the district will provide opportunities for special education students to interact with non-disabled peers and because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the revised procedures.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the provision of in-class support programs as required in students' IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Programs - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that students are not receiving the in-class support services required by their IEPs because of insufficient staff and the inappropriate reassignment of in-class teachers by principals to provide substitute coverage.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of programs in accordance with IEPs. The plan must include a mechanism to determine whether the district has sufficient staff to provide these programs. In the event it does not, the plan must include procedures to ensure the employment of sufficient staff. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure building principals are not reassigning staff to perform other duties that prevent these staff members from providing services mandated by IEPs.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, content of notices and provision/documentation of notices. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding parental consent prior to conducting an evaluation, implementation of the action, meeting participants, documentation of efforts to obtain parental participation, documentation of IEP meetings conducted via telephone, independent evaluations, provision and documentation of foreign language interpreters and translators for the deaf. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and ongoing administrative oversight to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find activities, pre-referral interventions, district-wide Intervention and Referral Service procedures, direct referrals, identification meetings within timelines, identification meeting participants, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and referral date documentation. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the determination of the nature and scope of an evaluation, acceptance/rejection of outside reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding written reports, multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services and functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and speech/language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although written reports were developed and signed, the evaluators did not date them.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all written reports are dated. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Multidisciplinary Evaluations for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that district does not include the required components of a multidisciplinary evaluations for students determined eligible for speech/language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multidisciplinary evaluations are conducted for students determined eligible for speech/language services. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and speech/language services do not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain the required components. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and reevaluation by June 30th of the last year of a preschool program.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the three-year reevaluation timeline, parent or teacher requests for reevaluation, documentation of attempts to obtain parental consent prior to conducting evaluations, and participants at reevaluation planning meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding eligibility meetings, participants at eligibility meetings, review of existing data in determining continued eligibility, eligibility determination criteria, eligibility documentation and copies of evaluation reports to parents or adult students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of alignment of goals/objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, and the 90-day timeline for implementation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP meetings, IEP meeting participants, IEP implementation, provision of IEPs to parents or adult students prior to implementation, teacher access/knowledge, IEP revision procedures, transfer of rights at the age of majority, IEP components/considerations/required statements and annual reviews. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements. It is recommended that the district use the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding IEPs for students eligible for speech/language services.

Area(s) of Need:

IEPs for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs for students eligible for speech/language services do not contain the required statements and components.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs for students eligible for speech/language services contain the required statements and components. The improvement plan must also include in-service and administrative oversight components to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding individual decision-making, considerations and required statements, least restrictive environment statement, supplementary aides and services, continuum of academic programs, instruction related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and opportunities for both in and out-of-district students to participate in nonacademic/extra-curricular activities with their non-disabled peers. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding invitations to students, shared-time vocational school program personnel and agencies to transition meetings, statement of transition service needs, statement of needed transition services, interests and preferences/post-school outcomes, consideration of students' interests and preferences, annual goals and objectives relating to desired post-school outcomes, career awareness/exploration/preparation, career guidance activities, post-secondary liaison(s), attempts to obtain agency participation at transition meetings, consideration of technical assistance from DVR, community based resources, collaboration/linkages with community and outside agencies/resources, and implementation of transition services by an outside agency. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section X: Transition from Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the preschool transition planning conference. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding implementation of IEPs no later than age three. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notification to the case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational setting (IAES), return to program after a 45-day removal, individualized decisions regarding IAES or any other change in placement, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, services for students when short-term removals are not a change in placement and due process hearings to determine whether a student is a danger to himself or others. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP documentation of participation in statewide assessments and documentation of approved accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding consideration of participation in statewide assessments for all students with disabilities, alternative assessments and the Special Review Assessment. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan 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 area of documentation of graduation requirements in IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding participation in graduation exercises. The district developed an improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding diplomas, notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercises/activities and written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Diplomas - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not notify graduating out-of-district students that they have a choice of receiving a diploma from the out-of-district school or from their home school.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that graduating out-of-district students are notified of the choice to receive a diploma from the out-of-district school or from their home school. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Out-of-District Notification - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not notify out-of-district students of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises/activities within district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all out-of-district students are notified of the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises/activities within district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice of Graduation - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that students both in and out-of-district are not provided written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students both in and out-of-district are provided written notice of graduation and that the provision of notice of graduation is documented in student files. The Improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the 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 age range, speech therapy group size and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the transition of students from state facilities into the district. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding class size, apportioned time for case management responsibilities, consultation time for special education and regular education teachers, class size(s) of resource program(s) and a description of the team teaching model. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of needs because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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 area of maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding parent and student access to records, consent for releasing records, amendments to records, staff knowledge of student record policies/procedures and access sheets. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the documentation of other locations of student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations of Student Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other records in central files.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records is noted in central files.**

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the New Brunswick School District on October 22, 23, 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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with some of the district's programs and services, particularly the TWIXT Preschool Disabled Program. Additionally, the district had already identified many of the concerns that were raised by the parents during the focus group meeting.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included the length of school year, staff certification, bilingual evaluations, alignment of goals/objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates on IEPs, documentation of graduation requirements in IEPs, home instruction and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students, length of school day, facilities, surrogate parents, content of notices, provision/documentation of notices, meetings, participants at meetings, independent evaluations, timelines, child find activities, pre-referral interventions/ referral process, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, eligibility criteria/ statements, age of majority, IEP components and required statements, copies of written reports to parents, teacher IEP access/knowledge, least restrictive environment considerations/statements, individualized decision-making for placement, participation in nonacademic/extracurricular activities, pre-school transition, post-school transition, discipline, participation in statewide assessment, alternate assessments, participation in graduation, class size, consultation time for special education and regular education teachers, case management time, transition from state facilities, access sheets for student records and access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding provision of in-class support programs as required by IEPs, multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, IEP format, diplomas, notification to out-of-district students for participation in graduation exercises/activities, Notice of Graduation and location of other student records.

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.