

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

District: Academy Charter High School

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: October 4 & 19, 2004

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Academy Charter High School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Academy Charter High School 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 Academy Charter High School developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a comprehensive desk audit, including a review of representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information. A focus group meeting to gather input from parents and community members was conducted on October 4, 2004. Parent interviews were also conducted in order to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff from the Office of Special Education Programs that the charter school conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and developed an improvement plan that appropriately addresses all areas of identified need.

Data Summary:

Review of the charter school's graduation rate indicated that for the past three years, 100% of special education seniors have graduated. Furthermore, with the exception of one special education student entering the military, upon graduation for the past two years, all special education students enrolled in either a community college or a four year college or university. Additionally, the data collected by the charter school show that 93% of those students completing their freshman year in college return back for their sophomore year.

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The classification rate for Academy Charter High School has been either consistent with or slightly below the state average for the past three years. The number of students with disabilities who are educated in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day increased from 22% in 2002 to 42% in 2003. Charter school staff indicated that addressing the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting is a top priority. A review of the charter school's self-assessment findings indicated that the charter school has identified areas of need regarding general education staff training. A series of workshops for all teachers was initiated during the 2003-2004 school year and is continuing this year. Topics include differentiated instruction, effective inclusion practices, dealing with difficult students in the general education setting, teaching students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and classroom practices that support achievement for all students.

Charter School Strengths:

The charter school is commended for their mentoring program in which both special education and general education students meet weekly with faculty mentors and participate in self-esteem building activities. The faculty mentor also monitors every student's academic, social and emotional growth. The faculty mentors closely monitor special education students to assure that the program developed for each student is successful. Additionally, the charter school integrates the philosophy of peer mediation in daily activities. All staff members are trained as facilitators and many students are trained as mediators. This process has proven to be especially helpful as a pre-referral intervention strategy for students with emotional or behavioral problems.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Eligibility, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were determined to be areas of compliance by the charter school 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 charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies and procedures, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of staff training. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of day/year, frequency, duration, and location of related services, procedures for providing services to transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of transportation as a related service and extended school year. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, written notices, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, meeting times and notices in native language. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of staff direct referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, Child Find, identification meeting timelines and pre-referral interventions. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluation, standardized assessment, written reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of functional assessment. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area 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 charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, providing IEPs to parents and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of IEP meeting participants, and teacher access to IEPs. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section X: Post-Secondary Transition

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences/interests survey, age 16 needed transition services and student invitation to IEP meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of outside agency involvement with transition services. The charter school'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 charter school accurately identified compliance in the area of interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of documentation of suspension to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavioral intervention plans and procedural safeguards. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of class sizes and age ranges, group sizes for speech and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of consultation time. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of access sheets, maintenance of student records and documentation of records in other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of access to records and timelines for destruction of records. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the Academy Charter High School on October 4 & 19, 2004. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process was to verify the charter school's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the charter school's improvement plan. The charter school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the charter school was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The charter school is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant during the self-assessment and verified as such by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Reevaluation, Eligibility, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

One parent attended the focus group meeting held on October 4, 2004. This parent expressed satisfaction with many of the charter school's programs and services. Several additional parents were contacted and interviewed via telephone. In general, the charter school was praised for its efforts to meet the individualized needs of special education students, for staff professionalism and availability to address parental concerns and also for the charter school's ability to provide "excellent services" to students.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day/year, frequency/duration/location of related services, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, staff direct referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, multidisciplinary evaluation, standardized assessment, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations, considerations and required statements, present levels of education performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, age 14 transition service needs, preferences/interests survey, age 16 needed transition services, and student invite to transition meeting, interim alternative educational settings, class size, age range, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance of records and documentation of records in other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-service training for staff, transportation as a related service, extended school year, surrogate parents, meeting times, notices in native language, referral process, Child Find, identification meeting timelines, pre-referral interventions, functional assessment, IEP meeting participants, teacher access/responsibility, outside agency involvement with transition services, documentation of suspension to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavioral intervention plans, procedural safeguards, consultation time, access to records and destruction of records.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group and/or parent interviews.