

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

Charter School: North Star Academy Charter School

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: June 8, 2005

Monitor: Barbara J. Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the North Star Academy Charter School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the North Star Academy Charter 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 North Star Academy Charter School 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 North Star Academy Charter School, on June 7, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE monitor reviewed charter school documents, including charter school policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, the special education teacher and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Face-to face interviews were also conducted with the charter school's special education coordinator and special education teacher, while phone interviews were conducted with parents.

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Data Summary:

A review of the charter school data indicated that the average classification rate at the North Star Academy Charter School for the past three years was 5.8% and has been slowly rising. The school reported a classification rate of 6.62% (20 of 302 students enrolled) in 2004. With regard to placement, even with an increase in the classification rate, the school continues to educate the majority of students with disabilities in general education settings. During the 2002-2003 school year, 88.2% and in 2004, 90% of students with disabilities in the school were educated in general education classrooms for more than 80% of their school day. These percentages favorably demonstrate the charter school's placement rate when compared with the state rate of 41.6%.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluations, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessments, Graduation, Programs and Services and Student Records 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of related services, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, transfer students and hearing aids.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified a concern in the area of the documentation of goals and objectives in the IEP. Although the charter school initially identified this issue as areas of need, the charter school was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of speech-language services. The charter schools will develop an improvement plan to address this area of need.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Speech-Language Services- During the on-site visit, it was determined that during school year 2004-2005, the charter school was not able to

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employ a speech-language specialist to provide services as stipulated in eligible students' IEPs.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the provision of speech-language services to meet the needs of individual students with disabilities. The charter school must also ensure that speech-language personnel are employed in numbers sufficient to provide the required service. Additionally, the service is to be documented and maintained in the students' file. The improvement plan must also include a mechanism to identify and provide compensatory services for those students who did not receive speech-language service during the 2004-2005 school year. These activities will ensure that students receive the related services they need to progress in the general education curriculum.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, content of written notices/notices of meetings, translators and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of 20-day timelines. Although the charter school initially identified this issue as an area of need, the charter school was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents and the provision of written notices and notices of meetings.

Provision of Written Notices/Notices of Meetings-During the on-site visit, it was determined that although notices are developed, the charter school does not consistently provide copies of written of notices and/or notices of meetings to parents.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents are provided with written notices and/or notices of meetings in a timely manner and that documentation is maintained in student files.**

Surrogate Parents- During the on-site visit, it was determined that the charter school does not have a procedure to select and train surrogate parents.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that there is a procedure to select and train**

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surrogate parents. Implementation of this activity will ensure that a person has been selected, trained and authorized by the district to act as a parent when after reasonable efforts; a parent cannot be identified or located.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of child find, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/staff, identification meetings, timelines and participants and the nature and scope of the interventions, referral process and documentation of the effectiveness of interventions.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of health summaries and vision/hearing screenings. Although the charter school initially identified these issues as areas of need, the charter school was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of written reports signed/dated, acceptance/rejection of reports and the components of a functional assessment for speech/language reports. Although the charter school initially identified these issues as areas of need, the charter school was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in participants at eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of severe learning discrepancy, signatures of agreement/disagreement, and copies of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to meeting.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting/participants, age of majority, 90-day timelines and annual review timelines, timely implementation of IEPs, IEPs in effect beginning of school year, copies of IEPs to parents and teacher access to and responsibility regarding IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Although the district initially identified this issue as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the area of steps to obtain agency participation at IEP meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of student interests/preferences, statement of needed transition services and transition agency invitation to IEP meetings. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

During self-assessment process, the charter school accurately identified compliance regarding documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, the interim alternative educational setting and 45-day return, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified a concern in the area of procedural safeguards. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 North Star Academy Charter School on June 7, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the charter school's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the charter school's improvement plan.

A review of the charter school data indicated that the average classification rate at the North Star Academy Charter School for the past three years was 5.8% and has been slowly rising. The school reported a classification rate of 6.62% (20 of 302 students enrolled) in 2004. With regard to placement, even with an increase in the classification rate, the school continues to educate the majority of students with disabilities in general education settings. During the 2002-2003 school year, 88.2% and in 2004, 90% of students with disabilities in the school were educated in general education classrooms for more than 80% of their school day. These percentages favorably demonstrate the charter school's placement rate when compared with the state rate of 41.6%.

General Provisions, Reevaluations, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessments, Graduation, Programs and Services and Student Records were all areas determined to be compliant with all of the standards.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents came to express their satisfaction with the charter school's programs and services. Parents also praised the dedication of the staff and the manner in which the school communicates information and accepts parental input and participation. They also expressed their satisfaction with the level of collaboration between themselves and the child study team and the special education teacher.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the charter school during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, transfer students, hearing aids, consent, content of written notices/written notices of meetings, translators and interpreters at meetings, child find, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/staff, identification meetings/timelines/participants, the nature and scope of the interventions, referral process and documentation of the effectiveness of interventions, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, participants at eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of severe learning discrepancy, signatures of agreement/disagreement, and copies of evaluation reports to parent at least 10 days prior to meeting, eligibility meetings and participants, age of majority, 90-day timelines and annual review timelines, timely implementation of IEPs, IEPs in effect beginning of school year, IEPs to parents and teacher access/ teacher responsibility, steps to obtain transition agency participation, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, the interim alternative educational setting and 45-day return, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention

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plans, manifestation determination meetings, the interim alternative educational setting and 45-day return.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified areas of need regarding screenings for speech-language services in lieu of testing, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, student interests/preferences, statement of needed transition services, transition agency invitation to IEP meetings and procedural safeguards.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding speech-language services, the provision of written notices and notices of meetings and surrogate parents.

Within 45-days of receipt of the monitoring report, the North Star Academy Charter School will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.