

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

School: PleasanTech Academy Charter School

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: April 7 & 8, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the PleasanTech 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 PleasanTech Academy Charter School 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 PleasanTech 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 PleasanTech Academy Charter School on April 1, 2003. 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, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

Charter School Strengths:

The charter school is commended for its commitment to the development of the total student. Emphasis is placed equally on character develop and achievement in academic subjects. The Celebration of Excellence program recognizes student

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

accomplishments in the classroom while the Care program allows students to interact with senior citizens in the community. All students have opportunities to participate in charter school based contests that challenge the student's knowledge in specific academic areas.

The provision of a mentor program enables every student to benefit from the support of one of the school's staff throughout the school year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Graduation 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 themselves compliant in the areas of policies, procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of professional development (implementing IEP and use of instructional modifications/supplemental services) and parental involvement. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, certification and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concern in the area of extended school year. **The charter school did not submit improvement plan activities to address this area and is required to do so.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding transfer students and related services (counseling)

Areas of Need:

Related Services (Counseling) – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through staff interviews determined that counseling is not considered for those students who would benefit from counseling services because of a lack of staff.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure related services including counseling are discussed for each student and that appropriately certified staff will be employed when the need is identified by the IEP team. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Placement of Transfer Students – During the on site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that because the charter school does not offer a continuum of program options, when students transfer into the school, they are automatically placed in a resource center program, even if a self-contained class is required. Additionally, because an immediate review is not conducted, the IEP is not revised nor is the parent provided with notice of the change in placement/program.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the child study team conducts an immediate review of evaluation information and the IEP and that students are placed in accordance with that IEP. In the event the team determines a different program is more appropriate, an interim program must be provided pending revisions to the IEP and the provision of notice to the parent. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of surrogate parent. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of surrogate parents because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings and written notice.

Areas of Need:

Notice of Meetings - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and staff interviews determined that when a meeting may be conducted for more than one purpose, it does not identify those multiple purposes. Additionally, notice of a meeting does not inform the parent that at their or the school's discretion, other individuals who have knowledge or specific expertise regarding the student may be invited to the meeting.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The charter school will revise its notices of meetings to include all required components. It is recommended that the charter school adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education.**

Written Notice - During the on site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and staff interviews determined that parents are not provided a copy of 6A:14 and 1:6A when a determination is made to conduct or not conduct an initial evaluation.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of written notice includes a copy of 6A:14 and 1:6A when a determination has been made to either conduct or not conduct an initial evaluation.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find activities, health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding direct referrals, the referral process, summer referrals, identification meetings and timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Direct Referrals - During the on site monitoring visit, information obtained through staff interviews determined that staff cannot make a direct referral to the child study team. All staff referrals must go through the PAC process. Additionally, child study team members refer parental referrals to the PAC without first conducting an identification meeting.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that staff and parents have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At the meeting a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. This plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Participants and Timelines – During the on site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and staff interviews determined that identification meeting timelines for PAC referrals could not be verified because the charter school does not consistently document the date of referral. Additionally, it was determined that the entire child study team does not consistently attend identification meetings due to scheduling conflicts.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted with the required participants within twenty days of the referral. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure referrals are dated. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Referral Process - During the on site monitoring visit, record review and information obtained through staff interviews determined that pre referral interventions and the nature of the problems are not consistently documented.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure pre referral interventions and their effectiveness are documented in the student records. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi disciplinary assessments, native language, signing and dating of written reports, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and standardized assessments.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of acceptance or rejection/rationale of reports and functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Acceptance or Rejection/Rationale of Reports — During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that when reports and assessments are submitted to the charter school for consideration, the charter school does not consistently document the acceptance/rejection of the entire report or any part of the report and rationale for the rejection of the report or part of the report.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure acceptance or rejection of reports is documented and included in the student's record. If the district rejects all or part of a report, a written rationale shall be documented and provided to the parent. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that functional assessments conducted for speech and language services do not include a parent interview, classroom observation in a non-testing situation and review of interventions when appropriate.

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

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure functional assessments contain all required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding three year timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Three Year Timelines - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that students are not consistently reevaluated within three years of the previous classification.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure reevaluations are conducted within three years of the previous classification or sooner if warranted. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, and documentation of statement of eligibility.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of a copy of reports to parent at least ten days prior to the meeting and signature of agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations.

Area(s) of Need:

Copy of Reports to Parents - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that for students eligible for special education and related services, parents are not consistently provided with copies of evaluation reports at least ten days prior to the meeting.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are provided with a copy of evaluation reports ten days prior to the eligibility meeting and that this provision is documented in student records. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Signature of Agreement or Disagreement - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that the child study team does not accept or reject reports or parts of reports and assessments when determining eligibility.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the charter school accepts or rejects reports or parts of reports and assessments and that documentation is maintained in student records. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives/core curriculum content standard, ninety day timelines, implementation dates, copy of IEP to parents and teacher access.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding reconvening meetings if required participants cannot attend, annual review timelines and program identification in the IEP.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Review Timelines - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and staff interviews determined that IEPs are not consistently reviewed on an annual basis.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that annually, or more often if necessary, the IEP team shall meet to review and revise, as needed, the IEP. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Reconvening Meetings - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and interviews determined that the charter school does not consistently make multiple attempts to ensure parents have the opportunity to participate in annual review meetings.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the charter school makes multiple efforts to ensure parents have the opportunity to participate in meetings. Documentation of these efforts must be maintained in student records. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Program Identification in the IEP - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and staff interviews determined that the Statement of Special Education and Related Services identifies instruction only as provided in the

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

resource center. It does not specify the type of resource instruction that is going to be provided.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the specific type of special education instruction is identified under the Statement of Special Education and Related Services. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti, and considerations and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of school age individual decision-making, supplemental aids and services, regular education access and a lack of an adequate continuum. Barriers identified by the charter school include a lack of teachers, lack of additional instructional space, a need for teacher training and the need for increased supplemental aids and services for students to participate in the regular education classroom. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised 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:

The PleasanTech Academy Charter School is a k-8 school and does not provide educational services to students beyond age fourteen.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

The PleasanTech Academy Charter School is a k-8 school and does not provide educational services to students age 3-5.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, home instruction and group size for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of common planning time. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of common planning time because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of maintenance and destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of location of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Location of Other Records - During the on-site monitoring visit, record review determined that central files do not document the location of other student records maintained by the school.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the location of other records is documented in the central files.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the PleasanTech Academy Charter School on April 7 & 8, 2003. 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 charter school is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the charter school was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The charter school 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 charter school's programs and services. Parents expressed their pleasure with the programs their children were receiving and overwhelming expressed support for the teachers who challenge and support their children. Because of the size of the school and classes, students receive a great deal of individual attention. Parents indicated that their input was welcomed and encouraged. Parents expressed a concern that extended school year programs were considered for some students but not all.

Areas identified as consistently compliant with all standards by the charter school during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Graduation

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the charter school during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies, procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, certification, facilities, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, child find activities, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi disciplinary assessments, native language, signing and dating written reports, functional assessment for special education and related services, standardized assessments, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives/core curriculum content standard, ninety day timelines, copy of IEP to parents, teacher access, Oberti, considerations and documentation, regular education access, class size, age range, home instruction, group size or speech therapy and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, extended school year, surrogate parent, school age individual decision-making and a lack of an adequate continuum, supplementary aids and services, and common planning time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding transfer students, related services (counseling), notice of meeting, written notice, referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, functional assessment for speech and language services, three year reevaluation timelines, copy of evaluation reports to parents, signature of agreement/disagreement, reconvening IEP meetings, annual review timelines, program identification in the IEP, and documentation of location of other records.

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

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