

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

Charter School: Pleasantville Charter School for
Academic Excellence

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: April 7 and 8, 2003

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Michael Lee

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Pleasantville Charter School for Academic Excellence conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pleasantville Charter School for Academic Excellence 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 Pleasantville Charter School for Academic Excellence 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 in the distance learning lab at the Pleasantville Charter School for Academic Excellence on March 31, 2003. Although no parents attended this meeting, information was obtained from parents through alternate means. This information was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed charter school documents, including 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 charter school's special education administrators, building administrators, general education and special education teachers, school nurse, speech therapist and child study team members.

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Charter School Strengths:

The charter school sponsors a number of parent/community activities in conjunction with the local parent teacher organization, such as “Math and Science Night.” This program provides parents with strategies for assisting their children with homework.

The charter school also implements a character education program called “Character Counts” which recognizes positive character qualities in students. A different quality is featured each month and teachers recommend students who exemplify these traits for recognition on a school-wide basis.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation was determined to be an area 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 area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures. The charter school is currently working with the County Office to obtain approval on their policies and procedures. The charter school further identified a need to develop a special education procedural manual. The charter school’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. In addition, the charter school identified concerns in the area of parent training and staff development. Although the charter school’s improvement plan did not specifically identify a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts for instructional staff, on-site monitoring indicated that the charter school has a successful mechanism in place. Therefore, the charter school’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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 adaptive physical education and length of school day/year.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of certification and facilities. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in the area of facilities. The charter school’s improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of certification. The charter school further identified concerns in the areas of transfer procedures, provision of related services, oversight of IEP implementation, and extended school

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year. The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address transfer procedures because the timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met. The charter school needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates. In addition, the charter school's improvement plan for transfer procedures, provision of related services, and oversight of IEP implementation is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures. The charter school's improvement plan for extended school year is insufficient because although the charter school has established an extended school year program, the improvement plan lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to ensure that the need for this program is considered for all students. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding frequency, location, and duration of speech services.

Area(s) of Need:

Frequency, Location, Duration of Speech Services – During the on-site monitoring, a review of IEPs and schedules indicate that IEPs may identify a range of services (1-2 times per week). In addition, it is noted that services are to be provided “individually or in a small group” without identifying a criteria for determining when the student will receive services in a group or on an individual basis.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs identify the specific number of sessions to be provided as well as whether the service is to be provided individually or in a small group setting. 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 consent, meetings, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of provision of 6A:14 and 1:6A and providing notice of a meeting early enough to ensure participation. **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 this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents, the Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE) pamphlet, and written notice.

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Area(s) of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members indicate that the charter school does not have a procedure for selecting and training surrogate parents in the event one is needed.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures for selecting and training surrogate parents. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE) – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicate that the Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE) pamphlet is not provided with notice of a meeting for speech-only students.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that PRISE is provided, when required, for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicate that written notice of intent to evaluate is not provided to parents of speech-only students for initials and reevaluations.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided, when required, for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of summer referrals, health summary, and vision/hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and the referral process. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding direct staff referrals and identification meetings.

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Area(s) of Need:

Direct Staff Referrals – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicated that staff members cannot make direct referrals to the child study team. All teacher referrals must first be directed to I&RS and may be forwarded to the team only after a period of additional interventions have been implemented even when a direct referral appears to be warranted.

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

Identification Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of student records indicated that identification meetings are not convened within 20 days of the date of referral. When students are referred from the I&RS team, there is often a delay in forwarding the referral to the child study team, even though a team member serves on the I&RS team. In addition, the full child study team is not consistently in attendance at the identification meeting.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that an identification meeting is convened with the required participants within 20 days of the date of the referral. The 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, components of functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance and rejection of reports and components of speech evaluations.

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Area(s) of Need:

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of student records indicated that the charter school is not documenting the acceptance and/or rejection of speech-language evaluations conducted by outside agencies. In addition, although the child study team has developed a format to document the acceptance and/or rejection of other evaluations, the process is not being consistently implemented.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of speech-language evaluations is maintained in student records. The plan must also include a mechanism to ensure other team members consistently implement these procedures.**

Components of Speech Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring, a review of pupil records and interviews with staff members indicated that speech evaluation reports do not include all the components of a functional assessment. The report format does not include an interview with the parent, interview with the teacher, and an observation in other than a testing setting.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech-language evaluations include all the required components of a functional assessment. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area. The charter school further identified concerns regarding planning meeting participants. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for speech reevaluations.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech Reevaluations – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff members and a review of student records indicated the district does not conduct a reevaluation when considering a change in eligibility for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. Parents are asked to sign a release based on a recommendation from the speech-language specialist without documenting a review of existing data and without considering the need for additional data.

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- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a reevaluation is conducted when considering a change in eligibility for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of eligibility meeting participants. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area 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.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding certification of agreement/disagreement, evaluation reports, and eligibility meetings for speech students.

Area(s) of Need:

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with school personnel indicated that there are no procedures in place to document that members of the eligibility team agree or disagree with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that members of the eligibility team document their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Evaluation Reports – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with school personnel indicated that child study team evaluation reports, including speech reports, are not consistently provided to parents prior to the eligibility meeting. Interviews indicate that no mechanism is in place to provide speech evaluations prior to the eligibility meeting. In addition, although a mechanism is in place to provide the other child study team reports, those procedures are not consistently implemented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all evaluation reports are provided to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Eligibility Meetings for Speech Students – During the on-site visit, interviews with school personnel and a review of pupil records indicated the district does not conduct eligibility meetings for speech-only students when evaluation results do not indicate a need for services. Eligibility meetings are only conducted if a speech IEP is going to be developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that eligibility meetings are conducted for all students evaluated for speech-language services. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP components, IEP goals and objectives, IEP implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of providing parents with the opportunity to observe a proposed placement. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The charter school further identified concerns in the area of teacher access to IEPs. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area. In addition, the charter school identified concerns in the area of IEP meeting participants. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. In addition, although the charter school's improvement plan addresses participation of the regular education teacher, the plan does not include procedures to ensure their participation at IEP meetings for self-contained students, when required. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding annual reviews for speech eligible students.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Reviews for Speech Eligible Students – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicate that IEPs for students classified as eligible for speech-language services are not consistently reviewed on an annual basis.

- **The charter school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that annual reviews are conducted for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area. The charter school further identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti considerations, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, continuum of services, and procedures to revise IEPs. Barriers to compliance include lack of funding and availability of staff. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because, although the charter school has identified numerous procedures and in-service opportunities to address these areas, many of the activities do not identify what will serve as documentation of compliance. In addition, the plan lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of training efforts and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of transition service needs, agency involvement, and student interests and preferences. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of behavior intervention plans. On-site monitoring indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area. The charter school further identified concerns in the area of discipline procedures and need for an in-school suspension program. On-site monitoring activities indicate that this program has been established and that time spent in this program is not counted as a day of removal because students continue to receive services. **However, the charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The

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charter school further identified concerns in the areas of suspension tracking and notification of removals to case managers. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because the timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met. The charter school needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates. In addition, the plan lacks procedures to ensure that case managers are notified each time a removal occurs and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The charter school also identified concerns in the areas of functional behavior assessments, interim alternative education settings, manifestation determinations, changes in placement, and provision of procedural safeguards to students who have not yet been determined eligible. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of the in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of student performance on statewide assessments. The charter school has indicated that, although students participate in the assessment process, levels of proficiency need to be addressed. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the charter school accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of age range.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of class size, group size for speech therapy, and facilities for child study team. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas. The charter school further identified concerns in the area of common planning time and provision of adequate substitute coverage to ensure continuity of special education services. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because the timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met. The charter school**

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needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates. The charter school also identified concerns in the areas of description of special class programs and homebound instruction. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 themselves compliant in the areas of parents/adult student access to records, procedures for destruction of records, and documentation of locations of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of procedures for amending pupil records. On-site monitoring indicated that the charter school has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area. The charter school further identified concerns in the area of access sheets. **The charter school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because the timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met. The charter school needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates. In addition, the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 Pleasantville Charter School for Academic Excellence on April 7 and 8, 2003. 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. The charter school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the charter school was able to identify nearly all 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 prompt implementation of activities to bring about correction in a number of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. The charter school is further commended for the many areas determined by the charter school and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Although no parents attended the focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring, phone contacts and written input from parents indicated satisfaction with the charter school's programs and services. Some concerns were expressed regarding placement determinations, provision of related services, and meetings.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the charter school during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, consent, native language, independent evaluations, evaluations, eligibility determination, IEP development, IEP documentation, age of majority, timelines for initial evaluations, graduation, age range, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, provision of related services, certification, facilities, extended school year, transfer procedures, oversight of IEP implementation, provision of administrative code and due process hearing rules, notice of a meeting, pre-referral interventions, standardized assessments, reevaluation timelines, meeting participants for reevaluation, eligibility, and IEP, opportunities for parents to observe proposed placements, teacher access to IEPs, least restrictive environment, transition to post-school, discipline, proficiency levels on statewide assessments, common planning time, provision of CST, speech, and case management services, class/group size, descriptions of special class programs, homebound instruction, access sheets for pupil records, and procedures for amending pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding procedures for locating and training surrogate parents, direct staff referrals, identification meetings, acceptance and/or rejection of reports, certification of agreement/disagreement with the classification decision, provision of evaluation reports to parents, and the following speech procedures: provision of written notice and Parental Rights in Special Education, conducting reevaluations, components of functional assessments, eligibility meetings, and annual reviews.

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