

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Trenton Community Charter School

County: Mercer

Monitoring Dates: October 13, 2005

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Patricia Fair

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Trenton Community Charter School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Trenton Community 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 Trenton Community 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the charter school's lead person, special education administrator, social worker and special education teachers. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the data submitted by the Trenton Community Charter School as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the school's classification rate for 2004 was 11.6%. This rate has decreased by approximately 4% from 2002. Data from 2004 also indicates that approximately 51% (33) of students with disabilities were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. Since 2002, the charter school's placement rates have fluctuated from having 63% (36) of students in general education in 2002 to 7% (6) in 2003 and back to 51% (33) in 2004. Charter school personnel attribute this to the changing needs of the student population however; interviews with school staff indicate that no students are receiving in-class support services this year. As part of the self-assessment process, charter school staff members identified a need

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for increased placement options, including in-class support and developed improvement plan activities to address this need. The rate of students with disabilities placed in out-of-district placements is significantly below the state average.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

This section was identified by the district during self-assessment and the New Jersey Department of Education during the monitoring process as compliant: **Statewide Assessment.**

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the Department of Education as compliant.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
General Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent training
Procedural Safeguards – For students who may be eligible for speech and language services (ESLS) or eligible for special education and related services (ESERS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Content of notice of a meeting ▪ Interpreters at meeting ▪ Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI) - For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find 3-21 ▪ Health summary ▪ Direct Referrals
Evaluation- For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Standardized Assessments ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators (ESERS only)
Reevaluation- For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reevaluation when change of eligibility is considered ▪ Procedures when parental consent cannot be obtained
Eligibility- For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eligibility Criteria ▪ Statement of Eligibility (Specific Learning Disability) ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation dates ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to the student's desired outcomes
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students ▪ Interim Alternative Educational Settings
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out-of-district student participation
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class size ▪ Age range ▪ Group size

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions – Procedures for intervention and referral services are not adequately implemented. The improvement plan timelines must be revised to ensure expedited implementation of activities. 		X	
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS) – Evaluation reports do not consistently include a summary of the educational impact statement from the classroom teacher ▪ Functional assessments (ESLS) – Speech-language evaluations do not consistently include all components of a functional assessment ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators – Speech-language reports are not consistently prepared. 	X		
		X		
		X		
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants – Meetings are not consistently held with the required participants (ESLS only) ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents – Speech-language evaluation reports are not consistently provided to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility conference 	X		
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants – Special education and general education teachers do not consistently attend IEP meetings 	X		

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP required considerations and components – IEPs do not consistently include behavior intervention plans when required. The improvement plan timelines must be revised to ensure expedited implementation of activities. ▪ Meetings held annually or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP – IEP meetings are not consistently held on an annual basis. The improvement plan timelines must be revised to ensure expedited implementation of activities. ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge/access) – Special education teachers do not have copies of IEPs and general education teachers are not informed of their responsibilities in implementing IEPs 	X	<p style="margin: 0;">X</p> <p style="margin: 0;">X</p>	
LRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuum of programs and placement decisions based on students' individual needs – There is a need for more resource instruction and in-class support 	X		
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of removal forwarded to case manager – The case manager does not consistently receive suspension notifications. The improvement plan timelines must be revised to ensure expedited implementation of activities. ▪ IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days – IEP meetings are not consistently held when required. The improvement plan timelines must be revised to ensure expedited implementation of activities. 		<p style="margin: 0;">X</p> <p style="margin: 0;">X</p>	

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Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the New Jersey Department of Education during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
FAPE	Provision of programs – Teachers, both general and special education, have not received required materials and supplies for instruction	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that teachers have the necessary materials and supplies needed for instruction. These activities must include procedures and oversight to ensure that students are provided with appropriate programs.
	Transfer procedures – Procedures do not include a child study team review of IEP and evaluation information	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the child study team conducts a review of IEP and evaluation information for students transferring into the charter school. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that transfer students receive appropriate programs and services in a timely manner.
Procedural Safeguards	Provision of notice of a meeting – Notice of a meeting is not consistently provided to parents	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of a meeting is consistently provided to parents and documentation is maintained in student records. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that parents receive notice of a meeting early enough to ensure participation.
	Provision of written notice –Written notice is not consistently provided to parents when required, especially if the parent is not in attendance at the meeting	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is consistently provided to parents and documentation is maintained in student records, even if the parent is not in attendance at the meeting. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that parents are informed of decisions regarding their children.
	Content of written notice – Written notice of eligibility is not provided to parents	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice of eligibility determinations is provided to parents and that the notice includes all required components. It is recommended that the charter school adopt the written notices developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. These

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Section	Area	Activity
		activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that parents are provided written documentation of eligibility decisions.
	Notices in native language – Written notice is not consistently provided in the native language of the parent	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that written notice is provided in the language of the parent.
LRI	Vision and hearing screenings—Vision and hearing screenings are not conducted prior to the identification meeting	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that vision and hearing screenings are conducted prior to identification meeting and that this information is available for consideration at the time of the meeting. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that all necessary information is available when making decisions about evaluations.
	Identification meeting timelines – Interviews indicated that timelines are not being met	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that identification meetings are conducted within 20 days of the referrals and that there is a mechanism in place to track these initial referral timelines. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that decisions regarding the need for evaluation are made in a timely manner.
	Identification meeting participants – Identification meetings do not consistently include all members of the child study team	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required child study team members participate in identification meetings. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that all required participants have the opportunity for input with regard to evaluation decisions.
Evaluation	Functional assessments (ESERS) –Evaluations do not consistently include an observation of the student and an interview with the parent	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluations include an observation of the student in other than a testing setting and an interview with the student’s parent. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that evaluations include appropriate information to determine eligibility.
Reevaluation	Timelines – Reevaluations are not	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that

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Section	Area	Activity
	conducted within required timelines	reevaluations are conducted within three years, or sooner if warranted, and that there is a mechanism in place to track reevaluation timelines. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that reevaluations are conducted in a timely manner.
	Planning meeting participants – General education teachers do not consistently attend reevaluation planning meetings	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that general education teachers participate in reevaluation planning meetings. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that general education teachers have the opportunity to participate in reevaluation decisions.
	Documentation of efforts to obtain parental consent – CST members do not make multiple attempts to obtain consent from parents when additional evaluations are warranted as part of a reevaluation	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that documentation of attempts to obtain parental consent for reevaluation are maintained, especially for parents who are unable to attend the planning meeting. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that attempts are made to obtain parental consent for reevaluation.
Eligibility	Meeting participants (ESERS) – General education teachers do not consistently attend eligibility meetings	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that general education teachers attend eligibility meetings. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that general education teachers are afforded the opportunity to participate in eligibility decisions.
	Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESERS) – Copies of evaluation reports are not consistently provided to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility conference	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents are provided with copies of evaluation reports 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that parents are afforded the opportunity to review evaluation information prior to the eligibility conference.
IEP	IEP provided to parent prior to implementation – The IEP is not consistently provided to the parent prior to implementation, especially if the parent	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a copy of the IEP is provided to parents prior to implementation in all cases, including when the parent is unable to attend the IEP meeting. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that parents are

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Section	Area	Activity
	does not attend the meeting.	fully informed prior to the provision of services.
	90-day timelines – Initial evaluations are not consistently completed within required timelines.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluations are completed, IEPs are developed, and programs are implemented within 90 days of receipt of parental consent and that a mechanism is in place to track these timelines. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that students are evaluated in a timely manner.
LRE	Documentation of LRE decisions – Statements in IEPs are not individualized	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs document individual placement decisions. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that placement decisions are based on students' needs.
	Notification and participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities – Procedures are not in place to notify parents of students in out-of-district placements of school activities	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents of students in out-of-district placements are notified of nonacademic and extra-curricular activities. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities.
Transition to Adult Life	Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” –Although the IEP format includes this element, it is not addressed for students who will turn fourteen during the life of the IEP being developed	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs address transition planning for all students who are turning 14. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that transition planning is conducted when required.
	Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings – Students do not consistently attend meetings when required, including students who will turn fourteen during the implementation of the IEP	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students participate in transition planning, especially if they will turn 14 during the implementation period for the IEP. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that transition planning is conducted when required and that students are afforded the opportunity to participate in the process.
Discipline	Suspension tracking system – There is not system in place to track	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a mechanism is in place to track suspensions.

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	removals of special education students	These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that removals are accurately tracked.
Graduation	IEP requirements – IEPs for students turning 14 do not address graduation requirements	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students who will turn 14 during the implementation period for the IEP address graduation requirements. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that IEP teams discuss the requirements each student is expected to meet in order to graduate.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Trenton Community Charter School on October 13, 2005. 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 review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify many areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the data submitted by the Trenton Community Charter School as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the school's classification rate for 2004 was 11.6%. This rate has decreased by approximately 4% from 2002. Data from 2004 also indicates that approximately 51% (33) of students with disabilities were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. Since 2002, the charter school's placement rates have fluctuated from having 63% (36) of students in general education in 2002 to 7% (6) in 2003 and back to 51% (33) in 2004. Charter school personnel attribute this to the changing needs of the student population however; interviews with school staff indicate that no students are receiving in-class support services this year. As part of the self-assessment process, charter school staff members identified a need for increased placement options, including in-class support and developed improvement plan activities to address this need. The rate of students with disabilities placed in out-of-district placements is significantly below the state average.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, a majority of parents expressed their satisfaction with the school's programs and services and staff. However, some parents expressed their concern with the provision of related services, implementation of individualized education plans (IEP), and accessibility of IEPs for special education and general education teachers. These issues were identified by the charter school and are addressed in the improvement plan. An additional concern was expressed by some parents regarding the number of students in the special education classrooms. During the on-site monitoring, class lists were reviewed and special education classrooms were visited. Class sizes are currently in compliance with code requirements.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Statewide Assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included parent training, consent, implementation without undue delay, content of notice of a meeting, provision of interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, health summaries, direct referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS), statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability), signatures of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale, reevaluations when a change of eligibility is considered, procedures when parental consent for reevaluation cannot be obtained, eligibility criteria, IEP implementation dates, annual reviews completed by June 30, opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs, activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to the student's desired outcomes, discipline procedures employed equitably for all students,

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interim alternative educational settings, out-of-district student participation in graduation exercises, class size, age range, and group size for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding oversight of IEP implementation, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, meetings, pre-referral interventions, educational impact statement for students eligible for speech-language services (ESLS), functional assessments (ESLS), written reports prepared by evaluators (ESLS), eligibility meeting participants (ESLS), signature of agreement and/or disagreement (ESLS), copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS), participants at individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, IEP required considerations and components, annual reviews, teachers informed of their responsibilities, continuum of programs, notification of removals to case managers, IEP meetings for first removal beyond 10 days, procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessments and developing behavior intervention plans, short-term removals resulting in a change of placement, manifestation determinations, and common planning time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding transfer procedures, provision of notice of a meeting, provision and content of written notice, notice in native language, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, functional assessments (ESERS), reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meeting participants, documentation of efforts to obtain parental consent for reevaluation, eligibility meeting participants, copies of evaluation reports to parents (ESERS), IEPs provided to parents prior to implementation, 90-day timelines, documentation of least restrictive environment (LRE) decisions, notification and participation in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities, statements of transition service needs, student and agency participation in transition planning, suspension tracking, and IEP requirements for graduation.

An additional area of need was identified regarding the availability of materials and supplies for all students, including those with disabilities. The Office of Charter Schools was notified regarding this issue.

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