



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



April 20, 2011

Ms. Janet M. Tyler
Superintendent of Schools
Lebanon Public School District
8891 Exeter Road
Lebanon, CT 06249-1731

Dear Ms. Tyler:

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE) conducted a special education focused monitoring site visit in the Lebanon Public School District in January, February and March of this year. The review focused on the following key performance indicator: *Improve the district's effectiveness of efforts to educate students with an individualized education program (IEP) as demonstrated by procedural compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), and students with disabilities' participation and performance on statewide assessments.*

The attached report reflects the BSE's conclusions regarding your district's performance in this area of focus and any additional items identified through this focused monitoring review related to compliance with special education law and regulations.

As part of the Connecticut State Performance Plan (SPP) and General Supervision System, the 2010-11 focused monitoring system ensures:

- a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is both accessible and available to students with a disability;
- a full investigation of the targeted key performance indicator is conducted; and
- if noncompliance is identified, corrective actions are implemented, evidence-based technical assistance is recommended, deficiencies are addressed and noncompliance is verified for correction within 12 months.

Additionally, part of the CSDE's responsibility is to provide general supervision of school districts' compliance with all state and federal special education regulations. When a review generates findings of systemic practice or a single serious incident that indicates the failure of the district to comply with regulations, the CSDE must notify the district in writing with reference to the specific regulation(s) being violated. The district must respond to these findings with a specific plan of correction and must provide acceptable documentation for verification of correction within a 12 month timeframe.

The BSE requires the district to consider the identified recommendations and complete the required corrective actions in the enclosed report. Specific activities and timelines are identified to assure compliance with implementation of Part B of the IDEA and Sections 10-76a to 10-76h, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), for those issues requiring action.

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An improvement planning session will be held to assist the district in prioritizing the recommended actions and in developing an improvement plan responsive to those recommendations. This session will be arranged and held at a mutually convenient time in the district facilitated by the BSE. A team consisting of at least the following personnel needs to be available to participate during this session: superintendent or administrative designee; director of special education; representatives from general education and special education; and a parent representative for children with disabilities. It is recommended that union leadership and board of education representatives be present in the collaborative planning process. The district may invite any additional members it deems necessary and is encouraged to bring any currently existing district improvement plans to inform this process.

Please review the findings of the report with staff and families in the district. The district is required to submit to the BSE a progress report of activities in six-month intervals to monitor implementation of the improvement plan. Brian Cunnane, lead consultant from the BSE assigned to your district, will contact you prior to the progress reporting period.

If you have any questions regarding the report or the district's improvement planning session, please contact Brian Cunnane at 860-713-6919 or e-mail at Brian.cunnane@ct.gov.

Sincerely,



Charlene Russell-Tucker

Associate Commissioner

Division of Family and Student Support Services

CRT:dcs

cc: George A. Coleman, Acting Commissioner

Anne Louise Thompson, Bureau Chief

Brian Cunnane, Education Consultant

Sandy Simon, Director of Special Education

Attachment

**Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education
Focused Monitoring Report**

Lebanon Public School District

Key Performance Indicator: Improve the district's effectiveness of efforts to educate students with an individualized education program (IEP) as demonstrated by procedural compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), and students with disabilities' participation and performance on statewide assessments.

Dates of Site Visit: January 31; February 8, 16 ; March 1, 16, 2011

Date of Report: April 15, 2011

Team Members: Brian Cunnane, Bureau of Special Education
Margie Stahl, Bureau of Special Education
Nikki Hendry, State Educational Resource Center (SERC)
Missy Wrigley, (SERC)
Jane Hampton-Smith, Connecticut Parent Advisory Center (CPAC)

Activities:

- educational benefit review process and student file review;
- staff interviews;
- parent survey;
- student interviews;
- classroom observations;
- review of district policies and procedures; and
- review of district data & professional development listing 2009-10, 2010-11.

Section 1: Reason for Review

The role of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is to monitor and support districts in improving results for students with disabilities as well as compliance with the IDEA. In August 2010, the Associate Commissioner of the Division of Family and Student Support Services (DFSSS) notified the Lebanon Public School District (LPSD) of concerns regarding data around the achievement of students with disabilities. Based on this data, the Department conducted a focused monitoring visit to determine the causes of the concerning data and to identify strategies to support the district in making improvements and requirements of IDEA for correction.

Section 2: Common themes

a. Parental Involvement and Communication

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- School personnel often communicate with parents via e-mail.
- Parents are able to see students' progress online through the school Web site.
- Special education staff conferences with families and students in addition to regular planning and placement team (PPT) meetings.

b. Use of Data

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The LPSD is only at the very beginning stages of using data and forming data teams.
- Training is needed in the collection, use and analysis of data.
- Training is needed in Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), especially for general education teachers.
- Staff stated that they need help developing SRBI at Tier 2 and Tier 3, especially for reading and writing.
- The LPSD has common assessments for multiple subject areas, but the staff does not analyze them as a working group to come up with common themes. Each teacher uses the data from common assessments independently.
- There is no built in common planning time for the staff to look at data.
- It was unclear how the process for identifying students who are experiencing academic and/or behavioral concerns is initiated. Some staff at the high school level indicated they had a student study team (SST) referral process; some said it did not exist. Others said they bypassed it due to the amount of paperwork and sent recommendations about students through other channels (e.g., expressing a concern to the guidance department).

c. Staff Development

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The LPSD has very little professional development (PD). The staff reports that what they do have is ineffective and not directly connected to what they are working on. The school was scheduled to have six PD days for the year. Two of these days became staff furlough days, while another was canceled due to the inclement weather. The district eliminated the remaining training dates due to the high number of additional school days they needed to schedule due to snowstorms.
- Special education staff does not always know the curriculum that general education teachers are using in their classrooms.

d. Access to General Education and Student Engagement

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The majority of students are included in general education classes.
- The students receiving special education at the high school level usually have a structured study period built into their schedules.
- Students participate in many afterschool activities from clubs to sports as well as participating in “X block” clubs. “X block” is a time set aside during school for students to engage in activities that interest them.
- The LPSD has a tracking system of different course levels: a scholastic; a college prep; and an honors/advanced placement (AP). It appears that the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities are automatically placed in scholastic level courses. Teachers report that the students with disabilities who are placed in honors/AP courses are students who have only a mild disability (e.g., speech and language).

- Through teacher interviews and classroom observations, it was apparent that although the overall curriculum is the same for all students in the scholastic level courses, the expectations for students with disabilities are lower, the pace is slower, the students with disabilities have fewer long term projects and out-of-class work is limited.

e. Additional Information

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- At the high school and middle school levels, there is no common planning time for any of the teachers. Special education teachers often do not have the daily schedules of the general education teachers thus making it difficult to schedule a time to discuss individual shared students.
- At the high school levels, there are no co-teaching classrooms. There is some co-teaching at the middle school but it is not a priority of the staff or the administration. Teachers interviewed shared that in their minds, the issue of the budget was the main reason for the lack of co-teaching models.
- Special education teachers are not able to provide academic support in the general education class due to scheduling conflicts. This type of support is provided by paraprofessionals.
- For the most part, paraprofessional support in the classroom is provided to students with and without disabilities.
- District data appears to indicate an under-utilization of the Skills Checklist as part of the state's assessment program.

Section 3: Findings of Noncompliance and Corrective Actions

The first day of the visit began with an abbreviated review of IEPs through the educational benefit review process. Both district staff and focused monitoring team members were in attendance throughout the day. While not specifically making a determination about educational benefit, this process allowed the team members to identify areas of noncompliance. A full file review also occurred to further address areas of noncompliance. If systemic noncompliance was suspected, the team reviewed additional files to verify the systemic nature of the noncompliance.

The following are specific citations of noncompliance with IDEA that must be corrected as soon as possible, but no later than one year:

1. **Statement of finding:** For student, with SASID # 3204480993, the IEP did not include the least restrictive environment (LRE) checklist.
Regulatory citation: 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Section 300.114(a)(2); 34 C.F.R. Section 300.224(c) and 34 C.F.R. Section 300.320(a)(4)
Evidence: Review of IEPs and student special education files
Corrective Action(s): By June 1, 2011, the district must re-convene a PPT for discussion of the IEP in order to address this on the LRE checklist.
Evidence of Correction: A completed IEP and LRE checklist must be forwarded to the assigned consultant from the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) by June 30, 2011.

2. **Statement of finding:** The IEP, for student with SADID # 1604615097, was not reviewed annually.

Regulatory citation: 34 C.F.R. Section 300.324(b)(i)

Evidence: Review of IEPs and student special education files

Corrective Action(s): The district must re-convene a PPT for this student within 365 days of the previous IEP.

Evidence of Correction: District convened a PPT for this student prior to the issuance of a finding of non-compliance. A completed IEP was forwarded to the assigned BSE consultant and corrective action verified as complete and acceptable.

Section 4: Strengths

1. There is clearly a sense of community and positive school climate that permeates all grade levels and parental interactions. Staff reported that they make time to assist all students. Students appear to be understanding and supportive of each other's needs; teachers report that they are willing to learn and work together if given the time and resources.
2. At the elementary level, there is a highly consistent understanding of the early intervention process (EIP). The EIP process is rigorously adhered to and reported as appreciated by the staff.
3. There was evidence of good differentiation of instruction occurring in a number of the general education classes. Teachers were connecting to students' interests; using effective instructional grouping; using peers to help all students with learning activities; utilizing paraprofessionals effectively; and including a variety of teaching strategies to maximize instruction and student output.

Section 5: Recommendations

1. Increase and coordinate a district-wide professional development system that focuses on effective co-teaching models; use of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely (SMART) goals on IEPs; maximizing present levels of paraprofessional staff; the effective use of data teams; differentiated instruction; and training in SRBI.
2. Allow for regular collaboration, planning and data team time among all special education staff with general education staff, including paraprofessionals whenever possible within the school structure. Support this structure among vertical teams in all schools, including special education and related services staff. Allot these times according to the school and/or district-wide assessment calendar, in addition to any team, staff or department meeting times. Develop more opportunities within the school day for common planning time for grade level personnel and the special education staff.
3. Develop a district strategic plan, based on data that includes short- and long-term targets and goals, an accountability framework and a clear structure for meeting expectations both at the adult and student level. The school level plans should also be developed and aligned with the district plan where appropriate but also address the uniqueness of the district's three schools. All progress or slippage should be measured through the structure of instructional, building and district level data teams. The plans should also explicitly address students with disabilities in terms of measurable short- and long-term targets and goals.

4. Ensure that district discussions take place regarding which students with disabilities would benefit by taking the alternative instruments (e.g. Skills Checklist; the Modified Assessment System [MAS]) rather than the standard test of the statewide testing program. This should result in specific guidance for PPTs to determine which assessment is the proper one for individual students with disabilities.
5. Discuss the possibility of changing the evaluation process for special education and related services staff to make the principal the primary evaluator and the director of special education the secondary evaluator, as building principals report that they have no direct evaluative authority for special education and related services staff. At least one principal stated that this has resulted in an inability to deploy staff more creatively and effectively.

An improvement planning session will take place on May 12, 2011, at an in-district location to be determined by the district and lead consultant. The district should bring any currently existing improvement plans, frameworks and/or goals.

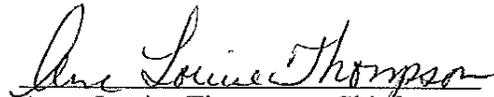
Report Prepared By:

Report Reviewed By:



Brian Cunnane, Education Consultant
Bureau of Special Education

4/14/11
Date



Anne Louise Thompson, Chief
Bureau of Special Education

4/14/11
Date