STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

April 15, 2011

Ms. Patricia K. Brozek
Acting Superintendent of Schools
North Haven Public School District
Administration Building, 5 Linsley Street
North Haven, CT 06473-2586

Dear Ms. Brozek:

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE) conducted a special education focused monitoring site visit in the North Haven Public School District in January and February 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 to10-76h, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), for those issues requiring action.

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. Dana Corriveau, 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 Dana Corriveau at 860-713-6944 or e-mail at Dana.corriveau@ct.gov.

Sincerely,

Charlene Russell-Tucker
Associate Commissioner
Division of Family and Student Support Services

CRT:dcs
cc: George A. Coleman, Acting Commissioner of Education
Anne Louise Thompson, Chief, Bureau of Special Education
Dana Corriveau, Education Consultant
Mariann Rossi, Director of Student Services

Attachment

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

North Haven 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 3, 8, 18, 2011
Date of Report:	April 15, 2011
Team Members:	Dana Corriveau, Bureau of Special Education Mike Smith, Bureau of Special Education Sally Esposito, State Education Resource Center (SERC) Carmiña Lizardi, Connecticut Parent Advocacy 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 North Haven Public School District (NHPSD) 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:

- Parental involvement varies across the district and by grade level. Schools often communicate with parents via e-mail, phone or notes home and/or meetings with parents. At the high school, staff reported using PowerSchool most often to keep parents informed, while the middle school cited the use of e-mail most often. Elementary schools often communicate via phone and face-to-face meetings with parents, in addition to newsletters and updates to the Web site. Parents surveyed through CPAC indicated a need for more support from the schools to know how to support their children at home (e.g., materials sent home for parents to reinforce content and skills with their children).
- Parents surveyed through CPAC were generally satisfied with the communication received from teachers.
- A few parents surveyed through CPAC noted comments from staff that they believed set low expectations for their children. Parents noted these comments made during planning and placement team (PPT) meetings and/or during the evaluation process to determine eligibility for special education. These parents questioned the reduced level of expectations that teachers had for their children. For example, some parents stated that their child with a disability gets very little/no homework in comparison to a substantial amount of homework for his/her sibling without a disability.

b. Use of Data

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- During the IEP and special education file review, the team noted that many IEPs did not contain relevant data on the present levels of academic and functional performance and in some cases contained no data at all. In some instances, concerns were noted but there was no data to support the concern nor were there any goals or objectives developed around it. It became clearer throughout the visit that teachers are beginning to rely on data more frequently and are hesitant to make decisions about student needs when that data is not present or does not encompass data relevant to the area of concern.
- In many instances, content area teachers provided updated data to special education case managers in preparation for a PPT at the middle and high schools. Content area teachers were sometimes unclear what to report as they were not collecting data specific to the student's IEP goals or objectives. However, the elementary schools report that special education staff are part of data team meetings. This allows them to be in regular contact with the general education teachers to know what progress students are making in relation to their IEP goals and objectives.
- Data teams are inconsistent in all buildings. Middle and high school staff expressed concern and frustration with implementing data teams, as well as scheduling a protected period of time for data teams, particularly with special education staff. Frustration arose around unanswered questions, roles of staff members, how the process should be carried out, and a lack of tools to collect and analyze data. Some staff cited a process that

occurred years ago where data was reported to the building principal, who then reported it to the superintendent and district data team. However, most staff was unsure if this process still existed. The implementation of common assessments for math and language arts appeared to create a foundation for these subject area teachers to build upon.

- The elementary school staff indicated much more consistency in the use of data to inform instruction, evaluate student performance and plan for student needs than in the middle and high schools. Staff members used a number of tools to look at performance by classroom and individual students. It was also noted that special education teachers or facilitators are regular members of the data team at the elementary level. The recent implementation of common assessments is a strong, initial foundation for the district in the regular collection and analysis of data.

c. Staff Development

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- While a plethora of professional development is provided throughout the school year, it is not strategically offered in relation to district goals. Many offerings are sessions that do not get any follow up assistance or implementation support. This makes it very difficult for staff to operationalize what is learned in any professional development or training sessions. All staff members, including paraprofessionals, indicated a critical need for paraprofessionals to attend strategic and meaningful training to support practices going on in classrooms and to support students. Additionally, all staff members indicated a need for special educators and content area teachers to receive professional development together with follow up assistance. A number of staff members also noted the need for specialized training in the area of autism.
- Most general education staff reported receiving training from the special education teacher they work with or the special education facilitator for the building. This training was appreciated by teachers, yet it was evident that some special educators were not confident they were providing accurate information to their general education colleagues, found it time consuming and did not allow for proactive training, but was primarily reactive problem-solving.

d. Access to General Education and Student Engagement

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- Co-teaching models between general education and special education teachers were in place at a few schools in the district. In some cases, teachers reported using the co-teaching model but when observed in practice, it was difficult to identify which co-teaching model was being utilized. However, in other instances it was evident that co-teaching team members were compatible in both personality and professional pedagogy, which benefitted the students.
- Staff reported frustration with the lack of curriculum and common assessments at multiple grade levels, particularly in relation to their inability to collect data on student

performance and write standards-based IEPs, but they recognized this work is in progress.

- Students with disabilities in the district appear to be included in the same activities as nondisabled peers. Students self-reported feeling involved and having good peer relationships.
- Many staff are aware of the number of students placed out of district and are unclear as to how these decisions were made for these students. As the need for more professional development in autism was cited, staff understood that most of the students placed out of district have autism. It was not evident that PPTs making the decision to place students out of district approached this decision in light of the least restrictive environment (LRE).

e. Additional Information

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- Recent scheduling changes are proving problematic for both special education and general education staff in a number of ways. It was noted that in some instances, there is no common planning time for teachers in the co-teaching model. Because special education teachers are split among teams and grade levels, general education teachers noted the difficulty in coordinating supports and instruction for students with disabilities as they were working with multiple special education teachers. The absence of collaboration and meeting time between general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals and unified arts teachers working with students with disabilities is also an area of concern. The district currently does not have a strategic plan. Many staff cited the frustration with not operating under a unifying philosophy. While all staff have a strong desire to move forward to improve the learning for all students, the lack of a strategic plan prevents staff from working under a shared vision, mission, and expectation.
- A notable number of staff held different and lower expectations for students with disabilities than nondisabled peers. Other staff that had increased expectations for students with disabilities did not have the confidence or skill set to provide an appropriate level of support and/or specialized instruction for these students. In some instances high expectations were clear and validated from multiple sources such as interviews, observations and the general school climate. However, there were occasions where a culture of contentment was perceived in working with students with disabilities. This may be explainable by a lack of attitudes, knowledge and skills on current best practice for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. It was unclear that contentment was intentional or due to the lack of a unifying purpose and understanding of the changing roles in education for students with disabilities. For example, some staff seemed unclear about how a special education teacher supports a general education teacher or how special education teachers are to use consultative skills as part of their role.

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 attended 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 and verified as corrected as soon as possible, but no later than one year from the date of this report:

1. **Statement of finding:** For students with less than 60 percent of their time with nondisabled peers, the IEP did not indicate that the child was educated in the LRE and/or files did not include the LRE checklist.
   Regulatory citation(s): 34 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): Conduct training and case studies on five students, two of whom are placed out of the district, on the topic of LRE and how to determine whether or not a student is educated in the LRE. Incorporate this procedure into the Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual and communicate this procedure to all building administration, PPT chairpersons and pupil services staff.
   Evidence of Correction: A consultant from the Bureau of Special Education will conduct an on-site follow up visit to review these procedures in the Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual and communication of updated procedures to all building administrators, PPT chairpersons, and pupil services staff. Additionally, five IEPs developed since the training will be reviewed, at the discretion of the consultant, for evidence of the state-mandated LRE checklist and any supporting documentation or justification as necessary to meet the requirements of the above regulatory requirements. This visit will be arranged with the district no later than December 30, 2011.

2. **Statement of finding:** IEPs do not include concerns of the parent for enhancing the education of their child.
   Regulatory citation: 34 C.F.R. Section 300.324(a)(ii)
   Evidence: Review of IEPs and student special education files, parent survey data
   Corrective Action(s): Ensure all IEPs developed include concerns of the parent for enhancing the education of their child. All special education staff, general education staff, PPT chairpersons and pupil services staff are to be informed of the need to include concerns of the parent on the IEP.

Evidence of Correction: In conjunction with the above stated follow up visit, the bureau will review IEPs developed from September through December 2011 to demonstrate correction of noncompliance about including the concerns of the parent for enhancing the education of their child and documentation of communicating this requirement to staff. This visit will be arranged with the district no later than December 30, 2011.

3. **Statement of finding:** IEPs did not include present levels of academic and functional achievement including how the child's disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.
   Regulatory citation: 34 C.F.R. Section 300.320(a)(1)(i)
   Evidence: Review of IEPs and student files, staff interviews
   Corrective Action(s): All special education staff, pupil services staff, PPT chairpersons and building administrators are to be trained in the Educational Benefit Review process by November 1, 2011. It is strongly recommended that general education representatives receive training as well.
   Evidence of Correction: Attendance list, agenda and any training materials used for the training. In conjunction with the above stated follow up visit, the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) will review IEPs developed from September through December 2011, for compliance in the practice of including present levels of academic and functional achievement and a statement describing how the child's disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. This visit will be arranged with the district no later than December 30, 2011.

Section 4: Strengths

1. The district has begun many improvement activities such as conducting data teams, revising and aligning curriculum, implementing co-teaching and administering common assessments. Implementation with fidelity and improving best practice require a relentless, systemic focus and a considerable period of time to fully develop. However, the district is positioned to continue this journey as it builds upon the previously mentioned activities.

2. Building administrators have become more accountable for special education in the recent past. While some administrators do not have a special education background, strong efforts are being made by all administrators to be active leaders in the special education decision making process in their buildings. Many staff articulated the positive support their building administrators have provided regarding special education policies and practices. This strength can be used to assure teachers have the most current information on students with disabilities.

3. Each building demonstrated instances of staff who displayed strong instructional practices for students with disabilities. All staff members would benefit from observing and modeling these staff and their practices. The district has in-house experts to draw upon to support the future work of the district. For example, a general education teacher was observed directing a paraprofessional in how to work with a pair of students, which fostered independence for those

students during this particular observed activity. It was clear this paraprofessional had not received that guidance previously and evident that it benefitted these students. In a co-teaching observation, the special education teacher was conducting a writing lesson using data that students used to self-assess their progress over the previous two months, while the general education teacher individually supported students.

Section 5: Recommendations

1. Develop a district strategic plan, based on data that includes measurable short- and long-term targets and goals, an accountability framework and a clear structure for meeting expectations both at the adult and student levels. School level plans should also be developed and aligned with the district plan where appropriate, but also address the uniqueness of each building. 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.

2. Examine the variety of planning opportunities to allow for regular collaboration, planning and data team time among all special education and related services staff with general education staff. Include paraprofessionals and unified arts teachers where appropriate and necessary to implement a student's IEP. Support this structure among vertical teams in all schools, including special education and related services staff. Particularly, focus on teachers in the co-teaching models.

3. Continue the curriculum development and revision process for all grade levels and subject areas in alignment with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to which the district's common assessments and instruction should also align. Ensure broad representation on curriculum committees to include special education staff. Standards-based IEPs will further lend themselves to the alignment of instruction and assessment for all students focused on the CCSS. Implement an accountability system for implementing the district's curriculum with fidelity.

4. Evaluate the process of decision making for students being placed out of district or in placements where they spend less than 60 percent of their time with nondisabled peers. NHPSD had 11.2 percent of its students with disabilities placed out of district in the 2009-10 school year, the highest of district reference group (DRG) D. Of the students placed out of district, 37 percent were students with autism.

An improvement planning session will take place on April 26, 2011, in the board of education conference room, 5 Linsley Street in North Haven. The district should bring any currently existing improvement plans, frameworks and/or goals.

Report Prepared By:

Dana Corriveau, Education Consultant
Bureau of Special Education

4·8·11
Date

Report Reviewed By:

Anne Louise Thompson, Chief
Bureau of Special Education

4/8/11
Date