



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



June 21, 2011

Mr. William J. Hull  
Superintendent of Schools  
Putnam Public School District  
126 Church Street  
Putnam, CT 06260-1890

Dear Mr. Hull:

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE) conducted a special education focused monitoring site visit in the Putnam Public School District in May 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. Jay Brown, 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 Jay Brown at 860-713-6918 or e-mail at [Jay.brown@ct.gov](mailto:Jay.brown@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  
Jay Brown, Education Consultant  
Jill S. Keith, Director of Special Education

Attachment

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

**Putnam 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:** May 3, 4, 5, 2011

**Date of Report:** June 21, 2011

**Team Members:** Jay Brown, CT State Department of Education (CSDE)  
Kimberly Traverso, CT State Department of Education (CSDE)  
Diane Smith, State Education Resource Center (SERC)  
Jane Hampton-Smith, 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 Putnam Public School District 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:

- Across the district, telephone and e-mail are the primary modes of communication with parents and families. At the high school, Ed-Line, a web-based progress reporting program is also available. The middle and elementary schools report the use of notes, student agendas and school/home logs, as well. Further parental involvement is encouraged through open houses and parent conferences which are conducted several times each year. Larger scale communication is achieved through the district Web-site and building-level or central office letters home.
- Parents surveyed indicated past concerns with the special education program in general, but felt that there has been positive change since the new Director of Special Education was hired. Most felt generally satisfied with their child's special education program at this time. However, a significant enough number expressed concerns around the following issues as to warrant mention:
  - Some felt that staff do not ask their opinion about how well special education services are meeting their child's needs;
  - Some felt the school does not provide information about organizations that could offer support to the child or family concerning the child's disability;
  - Some felt that during the PPT meetings the school doesn't explain what parents can do if they disagree with the school's decision regarding the IEP; and
  - Some felt the school never provides parents with the books and other information necessary to help them support the child's learning at home.

### **b. Use of Data**

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) / Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) data are analyzed district-wide to inform instruction.
- Two technology-based systems of data collection are present district-wide: AIMSWEB (for Math) and a component of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (for Reading). Staff indicate a regular use of these systems with an emphasis on the enhanced ability to more quickly manipulate data for analysis.
- Staff are responsible for entering individualized data into each of the aforementioned systems and fostering discussion and analysis of that data as related to individual students or small groups at team meetings. Larger group data analysis is conducted through professional learning community (PLC) meetings. PLC meetings are incorporated within the district-wide Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) process. SRBI practices appear to be well established and staff expressed a level of comfort and understanding with this process.
- District administration indicated a hope to add IEP Direct© and RtI Direct© to further enhance the accurate collection and use of data. IEP Direct© is a Web-based individualized education program (IEP) data base with robust data analysis capability. RtI

Direct© is a Web-based Response to Intervention© (aka SRBI) data base also with robust capabilities, but with applicability to all learners. These data systems are not in place at this time.

- At the elementary school, data collected and analyzed using AIMSWEB and DIBELS is primarily used to group students for instruction. Staff analyze this data on an ongoing basis, however this is done within a broader structure of weekly meetings and so the impact of a fully operational data team is lost. Interviews indicated that few staff are using data beyond what is collected through AIMSWEB or DIBELS to make decisions related to instruction or student achievement.
- The high school uses MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) which is a standardized assessment designed to measure general knowledge in reading, math and science. In addition, a system of data exchange has been established between the 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school staff and the 9<sup>th</sup> grade staff. These teachers, along with administration, collaborate prior to the close of each school year to discuss and review the IEPs of students with disabilities who will be entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade the following school year. Staff have indicated that they value and would like to continue, improve and expand these meetings.
- Staff across the district expressed a significant need for additional collaborative meeting time to address the many types and levels of planning and data analysis necessary to accomplish district goals.

### **c. Staff Development**

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- Staff expressed feeling very supported in attending any professional development they request.
- In reviewing the professional development (PD) offered to district staff during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years, several focuses emerged based on number of offerings and staff involved:
  - SRBI
  - Literacy
  - Effective Teaching Strategies
  - AIMSWEB, and
  - Curriculum and Assessment
- Of particular note is the high level of PD offered around the creation of previously-absent district curricula in math and literacy and the absence of special education staff involvement in that process.
- An SRBI Intervention and Support Process Staff Guide, SRBI FAQ document, and SRBI power point presentation for staff have been developed, distributed and supported through training. Staff felt that the newly-implemented SRBI practices were having positive impact in addressing students' academic needs, but did not address behavioral needs. Administration indicates that the implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model is expected to address these behavioral needs.

- For each of the district's current initiatives (e.g., PBIS, SRBI) an outside expert/consultant has been secured to further support that initiative.
- Overall, PD is generally aligned with Board of Education and district goals. Administration indicates that the alignment of PD offerings and approvals with these goals will continue to be a priority.
- The district has noted a preference to pursue PD offerings other than those offered by their local Regional Education Service Center (RESC), therefore a greater challenge exists in accessing PD due to their geographic location. To address this issue, rather than sending staff out to PD, Putnam has brought presenters into district. Additionally, building capacity in-district for training within their own ranks (e.g., DIBELS trainers of trainers) is present in the current district improvement plan.
- Staff express that a more collaborative professional culture has been fostered in the last two years and they express a desire that it continue.

#### **d. Access to General Education and Student Engagement**

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The continuum of services for students with disabilities within the district has recently undergone a significant restructuring to better reflect student needs. A well articulated description of restructured programming as well as a proposal for further program enhancement and expansion is in place. Observation supported that newly implemented structures for service delivery are continuously evaluated and, if further restructuring or refinement is found to be necessary, district administration readily respond to that need.
- Students with disabilities currently experience a service delivery model with a graduated hierarchy of services moving from least restrictive to more restrictive environments with priority on inclusive practices. An exception to this, however, seems to be the placement of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Interviews and observations indicated that the presence of these students in general education classrooms was not embraced by staff or students regardless of appropriateness.
- Though students with disabilities are primarily included in general education classrooms, there seemed to be an inconsistent application of differentiated instruction across the district. This was supported by some staff indicating a need for more direct support in differentiating for specific students' needs. Another staff concern that emerged across the district was a lack of thorough understanding of modifications as they differ from accommodations.
- For implementation during the upcoming school year, district administration have proposed the development of an in-district model of school-based clinical services to address, in district, the needs of students with emotional disturbances that interfere with learning. This proposal appears to be based in scientific research and is presented in a comprehensive format. It is anticipated that this model will increase access to the district's general education curriculum for student with disabilities currently enrolled in

district programs as well as assist in returning some students currently enrolled in out-of-district programs to the district with this added support.

#### **e. Additional Information**

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- An overwhelming number of staff and parents indicated that they felt the school district had demonstrated a significantly more positive and responsive climate during the last two years. Interviewees characterized the district as now “heading in the right direction”. However, a theme that permeated all aspects of the visit was one of trepidation on the parts of parents and front-line staff. Both staff and parent interviewees indicated that while they were pleased with the current district climate trend, they were cautiously hopeful that this trend would continue.
- The district has a significantly higher overall prevalence rate of identified students with disabilities as compared to state and district reference group (DRG) data from 2006-07 through 2009-10.
- Administration reports that, while staff are willing to utilize effective teaching strategies, proficiency in this area is very inconsistent across the district. Observations support this.
- District administration reports that there currently exists a significant divide between general education and special education; fostering two separate and not mutually supportive systems of educating students. This was evident in observations and interviews.
- Staff have expressed concern related to a significant decrease in the number of available mentors for new staff associated with the Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) process.
- The current copy of the Special Education Procedural Manual for Putnam Public Schools is in draft form.

#### **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. 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.

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:

**Statement of finding:** No evidence of noncompliance with IDEA was identified.

#### **Section 4: Strengths**

1. District staff at all levels appear to be eager to initiate or participate in activities that support the district improvement plan to improve the achievement of all students. There

is a general feeling from staff and families that “things are improving” in the school district.

2. The district has developed clear goals that include a standards-based improvement plan; providing high quality research-based instruction; expanding participation of students, families and the community; comprehensively collecting and utilizing data to improve student achievement; and improving the overall learning environment in Putnam. Objectives within this plan also address aspects of district operations which current administration have expressed were previously absent and were detrimental to the fundamental operations of the district.
3. The district has a well-articulated SRBI implementation plan that outlines goals, strategies and action steps; persons of responsibility; timelines; and evidence of effectiveness. Documents previously mentioned as associated with this plan are clear, comprehensive and user-friendly. The implementation of the SRBI process has been thorough as evidenced through staff interviews and observations.
4. Previously absent curricula has been developed and proposed in math and literacy. Development continues in the areas of science and social studies. It is anticipated that core curricula will be in place by the close of the 2011-12 school year.
5. The restructuring of special education services that has and continues to occur makes efficient use of the variety of services available through general education and special education.

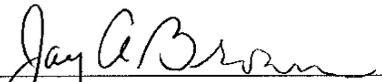
### **Section 5: Recommendations**

1. Develop a comprehensive plan to address the residual issues of trust that exist toward Putnam’s school leadership from Putnam’s parents and school staff. This plan should include specific objectives, measurable action steps, time frames tied to action steps, designated persons of responsibility, and evidence of progress/achievement.
2. Develop a comprehensive plan to unify and integrate the general education and special education staff and service delivery systems. This plan should include a component to identify and address any existing tensions between those systems through specific objectives, measurable action steps, time frames tied to action steps, designated persons of responsibility, and evidence of progress/achievement.
3. Review/revise math and literacy curricula currently proposed for approval as related to students with disabilities and any other relevant stakeholders not involved in the initial development process. Include appropriate special education personnel in the development of future curricula. Ensure that all district curricula are aligned to the CT Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
4. Review current practices related to the identification of students with disabilities with a goal of determining the root cause of the current elevated identification trends and, if appropriate, adjusting/modifying identification practices.
5. Conduct an examination of scheduling, time, and staffing resources with a goal of identifying additional staff collaboration / data analysis opportunities.

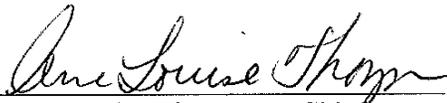
6. Conduct an examination of the PPT decision-making process regarding placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and staff skill to support LRE decision with particular focus on identification of LRE for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Report Prepared By:

Report Reviewed By:

  
Jay A. Brown, Education Service Specialist  
Bureau of Special Education

6-14-2011  
Date

  
Anne Louise Thompson, Chief  
Bureau of Special Education

6/16/11  
Date