



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



June 30, 2011

Dr. Louise S. Berry
Superintendent of Schools
Brooklyn Public Schools
119 Gorman Road
Brooklyn, CT 06234-1805

Dear Dr. Berry:

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE) conducted a special education focused monitoring site visit in the Brooklyn 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.

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
Kathleen Buchanan, Director of Special Education

Attachment

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

Brooklyn 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: April 5, 6, 7, 2011

Date of Report: June 21, 2011

Team Members: Dana Corriveau, Bureau of Special Education
Jay Brown, Bureau of Special Education
Catherine Wagner, 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 and professional development listings 2009-10 and 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 Brooklyn Public School District (BPSD) 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:

- Telephone calls are a primary mode of communication, as are hand written notes to home/school via student agendas, checklists, and daily logs. Email is used and more formal communication takes place during parent teacher conferences. District staff indicates that a fairly open level of communication is encouraged and, therefore, often times informal conversations and updates also occur during student drop-off and pick-up times, open houses and special events.
- According to responses received from the parent survey, parents are generally satisfied with their participation in the planning of their child's special education program. Parents responded that they were sometimes asked their opinion of how well special education services were meeting their child's needs and if the school had provided them with information about organizations that could offer support to their child and/or family concerning the child's disability.

b. Use of Data

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The BPSD recently-adopted district improvement plan which contains elements related to the gathering, analysis and use of data. While not yet fully implemented, the plan does include an identified need for professional development in data-driven decision making, data teams, and data entry and analysis.
- The use of data varied by team/grade and school. A consistent use of data was not evident throughout the district with some staff reporting ongoing use of a variety of data in planning lessons and grouping students and others reporting little use of data other than that associated with the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). Formalized data teams do not exist at this time.
- The primary sources of student achievement data are CMT scores, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) 2 scores, and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Additional sources identified were Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) II mini-assessments, behavioral tallies, data obtained from IEPs, benchmark assessments in Math and Language Arts, data resulting from Student Intervention Teams and Child Study Teams, as well as individual and anecdotal data from varied staff.
- Grade level meetings are the designated time in which to discuss, analyze, and develop the use of data to inform programming, however staff report that these meetings have multiple purposes and do not provide adequate time to reflect on data in a meaningful way. The current school schedules do not lend themselves to creating a more specific designated time to address data.
- Data derived from a student's IEP is more readily shared between general education and special education staff at the middle school level than at the elementary level. Elementary general education staff report feeling the data related to student goals and objectives as well as accommodations is not readily shared and often requires requests for the

information. They expressed that special education staff are “spread thin” and it is perceived that this may be a contributing factor. Middle school general education staff reports a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship with and support from special education staff, especially as related to level of assistance in sharing and analyzing data.

- In a follow up interview with the middle school principal, a clear picture of the district’s use of *My RtI* (Response to Intervention) emerged with respect to data management. *My RtI* is a purchased, web-based data management system through EASTCONN and is used to collect and archive data related to Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), benchmark assessments, and other individual evaluation data. *My RtI* is used to synthesize and analyze this data as well as record planned interventions along with associated progress monitoring data. District staff is trained in the use of this process but have not yet fully applied it. The District administrators and teaching staff expect that implementation of this system will continue to develop.

c. Staff Development

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- In a review of Brooklyn’s Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) for the 2009-10 and 2010-11, about thirty percent of the professional development opportunities had a direct link to Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) demonstrating the district’s commitment to moving forward with this process. However, during interviews, despite questions specifically related to data, staff did not indicate that SRBI played a major role in their decision-making. A small number of professional development sessions were linked to special education, particularly autism, to support the Intensive Instructional Classroom housed in the elementary school.
- District staff expressed considerable interest in taking part in professional development offered through the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) and learning more about specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (SMART) goals. Additionally, staff have an interest in reading training to better serve the district’s most struggling readers; more training related to specific disabilities and interventions; and strategies to support assessment. Staff wanted to continue with training related to autism and SRBI.
- Paraprofessionals expressed an interest in cross training in other areas of disability as they sometimes feel ill-prepared when covering for others paraprofessionals.
- Concern was expressed through interviews that, based on the district’s location in the state and staff coverage available for release time, professional development topics and the availability of presenters are limited. District administration indicated that ongoing efforts are being made to research and expand opportunities within limited fiscal resources.

d. Access to General Education and Student Engagement

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- The district has a highly inclusive philosophy in educating students with disabilities, as evidenced by many co-taught classes at the middle school level. Co-taught classes do not exist at the elementary level, with special education and related service support being in-class or pull-out.
- Instruction in the middle school co-taught classes is based directly on the general education curriculum. Classrooms were observed to have adequate teaching technology that teachers appropriately used to enhance learning. Teaching teams report positive rapport and excellent working relationships between the middle school general education and special education staff. Classroom observations indicate primarily one model of teaming in which the general education teacher serves as the instructor while the special education teacher serves in a supporting role, most often monitoring the classroom and addressing individual student needs related to the lesson as they arise. This too was the role of the paraprofessionals as observed.
- Middle school staff believe that there are opportunities to better allocate existing staff to support students. However, it was noted that the presence of specific staff in classrooms, such as a paraprofessional, is often due to services as written on a student's IEP. Many staff felt that the manner in which these services are written on the IEP often create inflexible scheduling of staff members that may not necessarily reflect the intent of the IEP. As an example, if the intent is to provide a student with additional support through a staff member who is available to assist them as needed, that intent might be met in a co-taught classroom where both a general education and special education teacher are present and available. In this scenario, the need for a paraprofessional's presence in that co-taught environment for this particular student may be mitigated and, therefore, the paraprofessional may be assigned elsewhere.
- In order to better assist students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum, a strong recurrent theme emerged around the need for more common planning/collaboration time. The current schedule allows for some common meeting time and all appropriate staff are encouraged to attend. However, schedules often interfere with having all appropriate general education, special education, and related service staff together. Teachers report needing to have conversations "on the fly." Further, when all staff are available, the time available is not adequate to address the many areas that need to be addressed during the planning period (e.g., data analysis, lesson planning, discussion of individual student needs, data-driven decision making, etc.)
- General education staff at the elementary level report not feeling included in the development of the IEP, but wish to be more involved. Concerns surround their primary role in implementing an IEP that they feel they have not been involved in developing as well as needing more support to implement the outlined services. Additionally, the general education staff expressed concern that they are not always asked for input related

to progress reporting on generalization of skills, nor automatically given progress notes after they are completed.

- While there was no observed or reported evidence that students' IEPs were not being implemented, staff at the middle school noted frustration with inconsistent paraprofessional assignments due to the need to reassign paraprofessionals to other duties. Teachers felt that it is extremely disruptive to both their teaching and the students' learning process to alternate, change or pull paraprofessionals once assigned and oriented to a given classroom.

e. Additional Information

The following themes emerged throughout the site visit:

- Four items arose less frequently in staff interviews, however, when considered together, have potential to adversely impact student achievement. Those items were the discontinuation of a school readiness/Pre-K assessment; a desire for a greater in-district continuum of services; a need for a stronger attendance policy; and Planning and Placement Teams fully empowered to make decisions regarding student programming and placement.

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:

- 1. Statement of finding:** Prior written notice was not given to the parents of a child with a disability a reasonable time before the public agency proposed to change the identification of the child. A description of the action proposed by the public agency was not included in a written notice nor was it articulated on the student's IEP.

Regulatory citation(s): 34 C.F.R. Section 300.503(a)(1); and 34 C.F.R. Section 300.503(b)(1)

Evidence: Review of IEPs and student special education files.

Corrective Action(s): For the IEP dated 11/29/2010 for the student SASID# 1832327941, a PPT must be held or an amendment to the current IEP created prior to June 30, 2011, to revise the IEP to include written notice of actions proposed related to changing the student's primary disability from Speech or Language Impairment to Learning Disabilities.

Evidence of Correction: Upon correction, the district shall forward a copy of the corrected IEP and, if appropriate, any amendments to the Coordinator of Focused

Monitoring, Bureau of Special Education for review and verification no later than June 30, 2011.

Section 4: Strengths

1. A strong recurrent theme of staff who places students at the center of the educational process was evident throughout the visit. Several staff interviews included the statement, “they’re all our kids,” when referring to both the general education students and students with disabilities. A well-embedded inclusive philosophy of educating students with disabilities appears to be in place. This foundational philosophy will serve to enhance efforts toward improving the achievement of students with disabilities and closing the gap between achievement of general education students and students with disabilities.
2. District staff exhibit an openness and readiness for additional practices designed to improve student achievement. This attitude of eagerness will serve as an asset as the district continues their work in this area.
3. The district has adopted a district improvement plan in which high academic achievement for all students in both literacy and numeracy is a priority.
4. The district has invested significant resources in professional development related to SRBI training. These trainings together with the purchase of the *My RtI* web-based program has created the foundation on which further programming toward closing the achievement gap between general education students and students with disabilities may be built.

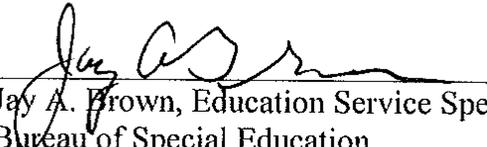
Section 5: Recommendations

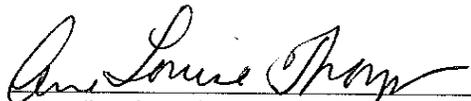
1. Examine the variety of scheduling and planning opportunities to allow for additional collaboration/planning time among all special education and related services staff with general education staff.
2. Examine scheduling options related to the assignment of staff to both co-taught and intensive intervention blocks in order to maximize staff coverage. Examine the interface between students’ IEPs and the building staffing schedule to identify the individually specific needs of students so as not to provide more restrictive interventions or unnecessary supports (e.g., paraprofessional support).
3. Examine scheduling options to allow for the creation of a designated data-team meeting time so that adequate time becomes available to address data, while addressing other necessary items during separate meeting times.
4. Fully implement each of the four goals articulated in the recently adopted district improvement plan.
5. Examine elementary school special education communication practices to assure there are no future issues that could arise that may negatively impact general education participation in the development, access to and implementation of student IEPs. Review/revise current practices of information dispersal between general education and special education staff. Highlight and model successful practices. Consider developing

co-taught classrooms at the elementary level to better unify the general education and special education practices.

Report Prepared By:

Report Reviewed By:


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


Anne Louise Thompson, Chief
Bureau of Special Education

6-8-2011

Date

6-10-2011

Date