

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Middlesex County Educational Services Commission

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: April 26, 29, and 30, 2002

Monitoring Team: Paul Bilik, Cecelia Downey, Elaine Lerner, Denise Wilkens

Background Information

The Middlesex County Educational Services Commission (MCESC) consists of the following school programs: Academy Learning Center, Bright Beginnings Learning Center, NuView Academy, Raritan Valley Academy, and the Regional Day School at Piscataway. During the 2001 – 2002 school year, the Middlesex County Educational Services Commission conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Middlesex County Educational Services Commission with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- the provision of a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities;
- the development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- the organization and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

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 MCESC developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Department of Education conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress made in implementing the plan.

Prior to the on-site visit, the monitoring team reviewed school documents, including receiving school policies and procedures, classroom schedules, master student lists, class lists and school calendars.

During the on-site visit, the monitoring team reviewed student count information, related services schedules, individual student schedules, teacher schedules and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records, criminal history checks, fire drill logs, suspension logs and therapy logs. The monitoring team conducted on-site observations of the school's special education programs. Interviews were conducted with the MCESC superintendent, administrators, special education teachers, school nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language therapists. Parents of students attending the various school programs of the MCESC were interviewed by telephone.

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School Strengths:

The MCECSC commitment to professional development is apparent and should be commended. A variety of required and optional training programs is provided. Training regarding the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) is evident through the alignment of lesson plans and student goals and objectives to the standards.

The MCECSC is commended for the consistency it has achieved in maintaining its staff for a significant number of years. Staff members, including building principals, school nurses and teachers reported that they have been with the MCECSC for more than 15 years.

Staff commitment to fostering opportunities for personal growth, nurturance and learning among students served by MCECSC school programs was evident during the on-site visit.

The Commission's use of technology to enhance student instruction is also exemplary. From simple switches, which enable student participation, to more complex communication devices, technology is used effectively.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Facility Requirements and Staff Requirements were determined to be areas of compliance by the school and by the Department of Education during the on-site visit.

SECTION I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the MCECSC accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of annual reports, amendments and the provision of programs and services in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, **NuView Academy at MCECSC** identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures for the joint training activities of parents and special education, related services and general education personnel. The school has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks appropriate follow-up activities and administrative oversight to ensure implementation of these activities. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

During the self-assessment process, the **Academy Learning Center at MCECSC** identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures for the joint training activities of parents and special education, related services and general education personnel. The school has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

During the self-assessment process the **Piscataway Regional Day School at MCECSC** identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures for the joint training activities

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of parents and special education, related services and general education personnel. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

During the self-assessment process, the **Raritan Valley Academy at MCEC** identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures regarding current IEPs and joint training activities of parents and special education, related services and general education personnel. The improvement plan for these areas of need is insufficient.

During the self-assessment process, the **Bright Beginnings Learning Center at MCEC** identified concerns in the area of joint training activities of parents and special education, related services and general education personnel. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

SECTION II. FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Commission accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the length of the school day and school year, provision of extended school year programs, provision of programs and services in accordance with IEPs, and services provided at no cost to the parents.

During the self-assessment process, the **NuView Academy at MCEC** identified concerns regarding the provision of 150 hours of health/physical education instruction. The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an appropriate administrative oversight component to ensure that the school provides a minimum of 150 minutes of health/physical education.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

SECTION V. IEP/ANNUAL REVIEW

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of annual IEP meetings, staff attendance at IEP meetings, accessibility to IEPs, staff knowledge of accommodations and modifications, observation of proposed placement, and areas related to participation in statewide assessments.

During the self-assessment process, **Nu View Academy at MCEC** identified concerns regarding current IEPs, communication with sending districts, and implementation of IEPs relating to progress on IEP goals and objectives. The school has developed an improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the self-assessment process, **Academy Learning Center at MCEC** identified concerns regarding current IEPs. The school has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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During the on-site visit through record reviews and staff interviews it was determined that the school does not communicate with sending districts when IEP components are missing.

- **The Commission will revise Academy Learning Center's improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that districts are contacted when IEP components are missing. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

During the self-assessment process, the **Piscataway Regional Day School at MCEC** identified concerns regarding communication with sending districts. The school has developed an improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

During the self-assessment process, the **Raritan Valley Academy at MCEC** identified concerns regarding communication with sending districts when IEP components are missing and progress reports. The school has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

During the self-assessment process, the **Bright Beginnings Learning Center at MCEC** identified concerns regarding communication with sending districts. The school has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

SECTION VI. DISCIPLINE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of changes to program/placement, terminations of placement prior to the end of the school year, use of aversive therapies and restraints, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the **NuView Academy at MCEC** identified concerns regarding tracking of suspensions. The school has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

During the self-assessment process, **Academy Learning Center at MCEC** identified concerns regarding standard disciplinary procedures relating to parent knowledge of procedures. The school has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

During the self-assessment process, **Raritan Valley Academy at MCEC** identified concerns regarding consistent use of time-out rooms. The school has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

During the self-assessment process, **Bright Beginnings Learning Center at MCEC** identified concerns regarding standard disciplinary procedures relating to knowledge of

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their discipline/behavior management procedures by sending districts. The school had developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

SECTION VII. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, class type descriptions, staff certifications, dispensing medications/nursing services and preschool programs.

During the self-assessment process, **NuView Academy at MCEC** identified a concern regarding participation in staff trainings on the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The school has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that Core Curriculum Content Standards are incorporated into classroom instruction. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

SECTION VIII. STUDENT RECORDS

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the school accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of returning records, access to records, access sheets, location of records, daily attendance, notification to districts of tardiness and absences. and mandated health records.

During the self-assessment process, the **Piscataway Regional Day School at MCEC** identified a concern regarding the accuracy of notification of placement forms.

The school had developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted at MCESC on April 26, 29, and 30, 2002. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify each school's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review each school's improvement plan. The Commission is commended for the many areas that were determined by the Commission and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

During parent interviews, many parents commented positively on the respective program attended by their student and the commitment to the students exhibited by school staff. Observations during the on-site visits confirmed parents' comments.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by each school during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included annual reports, amendments, provision of programs in nonsectarian settings, length of the school day/year, extended school year programs, services at no cost to the parents, dual employment, job descriptions, criminal history verification and approved professional development plan, approved facility, staff attendance at IEP meetings, accessibility of IEPs, staff knowledge of accommodations and modifications, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, areas related to statewide testing and use of the CCCSSSD, changes to program/placement, tracking of suspensions and interim alternative educational setting, class sizes and age ranges, exceptions, special class programs, home instruction, nursing and medical services, pupil record code, return of records, access and location of records, daily attendance, and health records.

The Commission is to be commended for the exceptionally comprehensive self-assessment in which all but one area of need were identified. During the self-assessment process, schools operated by the Commission collectively identified the need to provide joint training for staff and parents. Individually, identified areas of concern included lack of written procedures and training for staff on uniform use of time-out rooms (**Raritan Valley Academy**); insufficient knowledge of discipline/behavior procedures by sending districts (**Bright Beginnings**); lack of parental knowledge concerning discipline procedures (**Academy Learning Center**); development of standard disciplinary procedures regarding suspensions (**NuView Academy**); procedures for communicating with sending districts regarding missing IEP components (**all schools except Academy Learning Center**); and ensuring the receipt of a current and valid IEP (**Academy Learning Center and NuView Academy**);

The on-site visit identified the additional need for **Academy Learning Center** to be included in the development of a procedure for communicating with sending districts regarding missing IEP components.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the school will revise the improvement plan to address the additional area of need identified during the on-site visit and resubmit the plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.