

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Receiving School Monitoring**

Receiving School: Phoenix Center

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: December 6-7, 2004

Monitoring Team: Diane Mari, Janet Wright, Elaine Lerner

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Phoenix Center conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Phoenix Center with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- 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 the 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 Phoenix Center developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

During the monitoring process, the monitoring team reviewed receiving school documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in IEPs, staff evaluations, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students/ teachers/related service personnel, and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with the receiving school's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The Phoenix Center is commended for its transition services. Services are offered to all students age 14 and above. Rising Futures is a program which offers both onsite and offsite supported employment, volunteerism, and career awareness. The school also offers a Restaurant Program which prepares students for restaurant employment and includes activities such as writing resumes, completing applications, and interviewing skills.

The Phoenix Center provides opportunities for addressing IEP goals and objectives through community-based instruction. The younger students go offsite once a month while the older students go offsite twice each month. This community-based instruction includes full preparation, including communication and social skills, before the activity begins.

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The Phoenix Center also provides the students with the opportunity to participate in various activities which are aligned with their individual interests. These include but are not limited to swimming, horseback riding, a basketball team, percussion ensemble (which has recorded a CD) and a dance troupe.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding staff development, annual reports, amendments and programs provided in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding policies and procedures. The school's improvement plan was sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented activities for correction in this area.

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 Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech language and counseling services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding procedures for adaptive physical education and maintenance of hearing aids. The school's improvement plan was sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in this area.

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

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office and having an approved professional development plan.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the area regarding certified/licensed staff and criminal history verification.

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Areas of Need

Certified/Licensed Staff- During the on site visit, a review of records determined that a staff member is working under a substitute certificate while their application for New Jersey Teacher of the Disabled certification is pending. In addition, the school is employing staff members as aides whose responsibilities include supervision and instruction of students placed in career exploration type job placements.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all staff members are appropriately certified for the positions they hold. In addition, the receiving school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students who are participating in career exploration activities are coordinated and supervised by appropriately certificated staff. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Criminal History Verification- During the on-site visit, through a review of staff lists and criminal history documentation it was determined that the school does not maintain verification of the criminal history check for all staff members employed by the school. However, during the on-site visit, through staff interviews it was determined that the school has begun to implement activities to bring this area into compliance.

- **The school will immediately review their current staff list and submit requests for emergent hiring through the County Superintendent's Office for all staff members who require them. In addition, the school must revise their improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that the school maintains documentation of criminal history verification for all staff members.**

Section IV: Facility Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding certificates of occupancy and inspections and fire drills.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding programs provided in approved facilities. The school's improvement plan was sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in this area.

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

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as

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appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, current IEP prior to service delivery and documentation of implementation of IEP components relating to lesson plans and therapy sessions. The school's improvement plan was sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has begun to implement activities to bring these areas into compliance.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the area regarding delivery of related services and provision of evaluations.

Areas of Need:

Delivery of Related Services- During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews determined that the school delivers a combination of related services during a co-treat scheduling session that does not meet the minimum frequency and duration of related services as specified in IEPs.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the related services are implemented as written in IEPs. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Evaluations – During the on-site visit, through staff interviews, it was determined that receiving school staff members conduct their own informal assessments when a referral for the need for additional related services from school staff is received. Subsequent to their assessment, a determination is made as to whether the district should be notified.

- **The receiving school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when staff members believe that a student may benefit from the provision of related services, a direct referral is made to the child study team of the sending district. If the sending district agrees, they would send notice of assessment along with the request for consent to the parent. The district is then responsible for conducting the evaluation. The plan must include in-service training for the staff regarding the new procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process and procedures for termination of student placement.

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During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding notification of standard disciplinary procedures to districts, tracking notification to sending districts regarding suspensions and removal of student to interim alternative educational setting. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these of areas need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in these areas.

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication, nursing services, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding teachers trained in CCCSs and instructing in CCCSs. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these of areas of need.

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

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Phoenix Center accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding 5 days of tardiness/absences, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding documentation for students whose placement has been terminated and location of other records specified in central file and documentation of classroom attendance. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in these areas.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Phoenix Center on December 6-7, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Phoenix Center's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

The receiving school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the receiving school was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The receiving school is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address many areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, most identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. The receiving school is further commended for the many areas determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the Phoenix Center during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit include staff development, annual reports, amendments and programs provided in nonsectarian settings, length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech language and counseling services as per IEP, private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, having an approved professional development plan, certificates of occupancy and inspections, fire drills, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, procedures for termination of student placement, class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction dispensing medication, nursing services, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, medical exams for sport teams, areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness /absences, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Phoenix Center identified concerns in the areas regarding policies and procedures, procedures for adaptive physical education, maintenance of hearing aids, programs provided in approved facilities communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, current IEP prior to service delivery, documentation of implementation of IEP components relating to lesson plans and therapy sessions, teachers trained in CCCSs and instructing in CCCSs., documentation

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for students whose placement has been terminated, location of other records specified in central file, documentation of classroom attendance, notification of standard disciplinary procedures, tracking notification to sending districts regarding suspensions and removal of student to interim alternative educational setting.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding certified/licensed staff, criminal history verification, provision of related services and provision of evaluations.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Phoenix Center will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the county office of education and to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.