

New Hampshire Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education

Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process
2002-2003 Year End Summary Report

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INTRODUCTION

The success of the New Hampshire Department of Education's Program Approval and Improvement Process is the result of the contributions and collaboration of many stakeholders. This is the 17th year that The Southeastern Regional Education Service Center has worked with the NHDOE in the oversight and implementation of the Special Education Program Approval Process. The report that follows is a review of progress made in addressing the goals outlined in the Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process proposal dated July 26, 2002.

SUMMARY REPORT:

SERESC's Plan for Conducting the Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process, FY 2002-2003, had three broad goals. A summary of progress in reaching those goals follows.

Goal #1: To establish an effective Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process that supports continuous, sustainable program initiatives statewide, resulting in improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

As outlined in the proposal, the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process has maintained an experienced management team that has been responsible for the oversight of all monitoring activities. *(See Appendix for the names and credentials of the 2002-2003 Program Approval Management Team members.)*

VOLUNTEERS FROM THE FIELD

In order to carry out the many aspects of program approval, the management team also depends upon the expertise of the field to assist. As part of the management team, the two projects assistants have been responsible for maintaining the database of volunteers from the field who assist as visiting team members in the varied program approval activities. To date, over 1,200 professionals have offered to volunteer their time to serve as visiting team members. During the 2002-03 school year the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process utilized 370 of these individuals to fill various roles ranging from serving on Case Study Compliance Reviews to conducting focus groups, serving on teams reviewing corrective action plans, or assisting the NHDOE and SERESC with presentations made to the field. At the start of each school year, recruitment letters are sent out to SAU special education directors, school principals and private special education schools asking for volunteers to serve on teams. *(See Appendix for sample letter and volunteer form).*

The visiting team members are required to attend an orientation on the first morning of program approval activities to better prepare them for their roles and responsibilities. *(See Appendix for Talking Points For Case Study Compliance Review - the document used by the Technical Assistants.)*

As part of the program approval data collection activities, each visiting team member was asked to complete a "reactionnaire" at the end of their visit and these responses were collected, summarized and reviewed at the end of the 2002-03 school year. The feedback from the visiting team members indicated the following:

- 78.8 % were fully or mostly satisfied with the orientation and training provided
- 93% found that the program approval materials were appropriate and effective
- 96.2% indicated that the collaboration between visiting and building level teams was effective
- 87.5% indicated that they thought the process of summarizing the data was effective

(See Appendix for sample reactionaire and graph with specific breakdown of information – external [visiting] team members.)

In response to this feedback, the Program Approval Management Team has developed a “Visitor Orientation Manual” that will be provided to each individual prior to arrival at all 2003-04 program approval activities. *(See Appendix for sample manual)*

BUILDING LEVEL TEAM MEMBERS

The program approval management team was also responsible for professional development and training of each LEA/Private School staff in the preparation and presentation of Case Study Compliance Reviews. Training sessions were held with all the 2002-03 sites for the purpose of reviewing the procedures for gathering data and presenting case studies. Sample case studies were provided to building level teams, as well as sample building level summary reports. Additionally, the management team worked closely with the special education administrators in preparing for the Case Study Compliance Review, which included several pre-meetings, a review of polices and procedures and qualifications of staff, ensuring the accuracy of spedis program data, and ensuring that required paperwork for any newly developed programs had been submitted. As part of this training, the management team developed a one-page guide for case study presentations. *(See Appendix for sample Case Study Presentation document and Countdown to Case Study Compliance Review).*

Feedback gathered from 2002-03 building level team members has been summarized as follows:
Out of 169 building level reactionaires returned:

- 72% were fully or mostly satisfied with the orientation and training provided
- 84% found that the program approval materials and documents were effective
- 92.5% indicated that the collaboration between the visiting and building level teams was effective
- 88 % indicated that they thought the process of summarizing the data was effective

(See Appendix for sample reactionaire and graph with specific breakdown of information – internal [building level] team members)

In response to feedback from the field, the Program Approval Management Team has developed a “Building Level Orientation Manual” that will be provided to each individual attending training/orientation sessions at all 2003-04 Case Study Compliance Review site. *(See Appendix for sample manual)*

At the end of the 2002-03 school year, the management team requested feedback from all special education administrators, superintendents and private school program directors involved in program approval activities. In addition, these individuals copied the reactionaires and distributed them to other pertinent staff. A total of 71 surveys were mailed, and 38 were returned.

In answer to the first two survey questions below, all 38 respondents (100%) answered 5 (fully) or 4 (mostly).

- 1.) “SERESC/NHDOE provided adequate support, technical assistance and training in preparation for the Case Study Compliance Review” and

- 2.) "There was an open line of communication with SERESC/NHDOE in providing all necessary information/documents/tools for the implementation of the NHDOE Case Study Compliance Review Process"

In answer to the remaining survey questions below, 87% of the respondents answered 5 (fully) or 4 (mostly).

- 3.) "The materials provided by the NHDOE (Data Collection Forms, Interview Forms, sample documents, templates, etc) were effective in collecting data around the focus areas of Access to the General Curriculum, Transition and Assessment"
- 4.) "The visiting team members assigned to work within your educational community were a helpful resource and were productive contributors to the case study compliance review"
- 5.) "The report summarizing the findings of the collaborative teams was helpful in targeting areas of improvement" and
- 6.) "The corrective action/improvement plan that was developed as a result of the NHDOE Case Study Compliance Review will have a long term impact on program improvements"

OTHER DUTIES

Other duties performed by the Program Approval Management Team included conducting James O. Compliance Reviews, Shelter Care Facility Compliance Reviews and Audit Reviews, as well as reviewing and following up on all application materials submitted for approval of new programs. A significant amount of time was dedicated to the revision of all case study compliance documents, tool kits, application materials, and the management team handbook. Additionally, any related activities determined by the NHDOE, Bureau of Special Education were incorporated into the work scope. Examples of such activities include serving on committees such as: QUILT, CARE NH, Graduation Task Force, Program Approval Rubric, etc. By serving on such committees the management team is better able to ensure that the program approval process is supporting and integrating current NHDOE initiatives into program approval activities. Lastly, the management team has been responsible for working collaboratively with the NHDOE in the writing of reports, summaries and correspondence related to the above program approval activities. These documents have been provided to the NHDOE throughout the 2002-03 school year.

(See Appendix for the following: lists of 2002-03 case study and yearlong sites, list of audit visits, list of corrective action visits conducted and list of sites requesting approval of new programs.)

GOAL #2 To provide educators, families and communities with greater access to and participation in the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process that:

- **Encourages cooperative problem solving by fully including the voices of parents, families, students, educators, agencies, and community members**
- **Promotes promising practices in the fields of special and general education; and**
- **Offers professional development opportunities based on current research**

In order to accomplish this goal, the Program Approval Management Team was charged with several objectives.

PARENT INPUT

As part of their work scope, the Program Approval Management Team is responsible for collecting, documenting and recording parent input in all program approval activities and reports that have been sent to the NHDOE. At this time, the management team does not have the ability to report statewide data that has been collected from parents, due to the fact that parent feedback is not gathered in a consistent manner. At the request of LEAs, sites going through program approval have the option of designing their own data collection activities. The result has been tools and collection methods that vary from site to site,

which are summarized and reported in differing formats, making it difficult to look for statewide trends. For example, some districts chose to use the sample parent survey developed by the management team; others designed a customized survey that collected additional data. Still others opted to conduct focus groups with parents to gather the required feedback. The management team had the responsibility to ensure that LEAs and private schools collect additional parental input beyond the small groups of parents who are individually interviewed as part of the Case Study Process. The information that was gathered and analyzed was included in the summary reports. (*See Appendix for sample parent survey and cover letter.*)

Parents were also encouraged to serve as members of the yearlong improvement teams. We have found that having parents, students and board members involved in various aspects of the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval Process has just begun to open the door to improved communications. By including these key stakeholders in almost all aspects of the Special Education Program Approval Process, we have begun to create an exchange of ideas and information related to the programs and services made available to children and youth with disabilities.

At the direction of the NHDOE, the Program Approval Management Team has delayed the formation of a parent advisory committee, as there was a recent statewide RFP issued by the NHDOE calling for the formation of a parent advisory group with an executive director position that will link many statewide special education initiatives with a stronger parent component. Once this board/organization is formed, the management team will look to the executive director of that organization to work with us on developing the most effective ways to incorporate additional parental involvement in the Special Education Program Approval And Improvement Process.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS

For all the 2002-03 sites, the Program Approval Management Team was responsible for many professional development offerings, which included networking sessions, program approval orientations, and technical assistance to individual sites as necessary. Below is a listing of the events with a summary of the data that was collected.

Five Facilitator Networking Sessions were held for sites involved in the yearlong self-study during the 2002-03 school year. We collected a total of 29 feedback forms from people attending the five sessions. On the final question of the form, "Overall, I would rate this training session as", 20 of the respondents gave the sessions the highest rating of 4 (excellent), and six gave the second highest rating of 3 (good). The remaining three respondents did not answer that question. For all of the other questions, at least 90% of the respondents answered with a rating of 4 (excellent/completely) or 3 (good/mostly).

Three informational sessions were held in the spring of 2003 for sites preparing to undergo Special Education Program Approval in 2003-04. The first was held in Plymouth on 3/31/03, the second in Hanover on 4/30/03 and the third at SERESC in Bedford on 5/22/03. We collected a total of 24 response forms from attendees. Of those, over 90% of the respondents answered with a rating of 4 (excellent/completely) or 3 (good/mostly) in all categories, with 100% giving the session an overall rating of 4 or 3.

(See Appendix for networking session agendas, informational session agendas and sample reaction forms)

Goal #3: To design a comprehensive data collection system for the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process. The data gathered will provide a reliable method to identify statewide patterns of program strengths, issues of significance and areas in need of improvement. This data will be available for use by the NHDOE to inform the process of educational improvements.

The program approval management team continues to work toward more efficient ways to gather and analyze data. As we work on establishing baseline and ongoing data, several databases have been developed for the Program Approval and Improvement Process. These include: summaries all of the feedback collected from special education directors, building level team members and visiting team members participating in Case Study Compliance Reviews, as well as reactions to professional development opportunities made available through the program approval process (all mentioned above).

During the upcoming school year, the management team will also be collecting and storing demographic data from both private and public schools (*See Appendix for the LEA/School Profile pages from the 2003-04 applications*). This information will appear in Case Study Compliance Review reports and will also be stored and analyzed over time in order to identify statewide trends in such areas as staff retention and qualifications, drop out rates for children with disabilities, etc. As part of our on-going technical assistance provided to the field, the management team continues to reinforce the importance of using data to inform decisions made for children and youth with disabilities.

As part of goal # 3, the program approval management team was charged with looking at the data collected through Case Study Compliance Reviews. We are now able to enter the data from each school visited and summarize, review and analyze that data. The information on each Building Level Data Summary Form related to Access to the General Curriculum, Transition, and Assessment was collected and entered into a database. The tables on the following three pages show the total number of student cases studied during the 2002-03 school year and the evidence demonstrated in each of the three focus areas.

Private Schools								
ACCESS TO THE GENERAL CURRICULUM QUESTIONS	No Access		Partial Access		Full Access		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Student has access to the general curriculum (as outlined by the district, the sending district or NH frameworks)	0	0%	6	24%	19	76%	0
Student has opportunities to interact with non-disabled peers on a regular basis	4	16%	10	40%	11	44%	0	0%
Student has access to the general curriculum in a general education setting with non-disabled peers	9	39%	5	22%	9	39%	0	0%
Student participates and progresses in the general curriculum in a general education setting with non-disabled peers with necessary supports	9	39%	4	17%	10	43%	0	0%
Student has opportunities to participate in general extracurricular and other non-academic activities with necessary supports	1	4%	7	28%	17	68%	0	0%
Student participates in general extracurricular and other non-academic activities with necessary supports	2	8%	10	40%	13	52%	0	0%

Public Schools								
ACCESS TO THE GENERAL CURRICULUM QUESTIONS	No Access		Partial Access		Full Access		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Student has access to the general curriculum (as outlined by the district, the sending district or NH frameworks)	3	1%	64	17%	308	82%	0
Student has opportunities to interact with non-disabled peers on a regular basis	4	1%	35	9%	336	90%	0	0%
Student has access to the general curriculum in a general education setting with non-disabled peers	11	3%	97	26%	264	71%	0	0%
Student participates and progresses in the general curriculum in a general education setting with non-disabled peers with necessary supports	9	2%	81	22%	281	76%	0	0%
Student has opportunities to participate in general extracurricular and other non-academic activities with necessary supports	10	3%	12	3%	342	94%	0	0%
Student participates in general extracurricular and other non-academic activities with necessary supports	24	7%	38	11%	289	81%	4	1%

Private Schools

TRANSITION QUESTIONS	No Evidence		Partial Informal/ Documentation		Complete or Formal Documentation		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Transition planning from grade to grade takes place	3	14%	3	14%	13	59%	3
Transition planning from school to school takes place	0	0%	7	30%	14	61%	2	9%
Team around transition includes parents	0	0%	7	30%	16	70%	0	0%
Team around transition includes appropriate agencies	0	0%	5	22%	13	57%	5	22%
Transition planning occurs 90 days prior to child's 3rd birthday	0	0%	1	5%	4	19%	16	76%
By age 14 student participates in transition planning	3	13%	1	4%	9	39%	10	43%
* By age 16 transition plan addresses <i>instruction, community, employment and daily life skills</i>	2	10%	0	0%	8	38%	11	52%
Student is informed prior to age 17 of his/her rights under IDEA	2	10%	0	0%	7	33%	12	57%
District has implemented a process to evaluate the success of a student's transition plan	4	17%	7	30%	9	39%	3	13%
Team, including student as appropriate, regularly assesses success of transition plan	5	23%	8	36%	9	41%	0	0%

Public Schools

TRANSITION QUESTIONS	No Evidence		Partial Informal/ Documentation		Complete or Formal Documentation		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Transition planning from grade to grade takes place	11	3%	193	51%	160	43%	11
Transition planning from school to school takes place	10	3%	117	31%	158	42%	91	24%
Team around transition includes parents	8	2%	116	31%	242	65%	7	2%
Team around transition includes appropriate agencies	3	1%	45	12%	143	38%	182	49%
Transition planning occurs 90 days prior to child's 3rd birthday	7	2%	16	4%	35	10%	309	84%
By age 14 student participates in transition planning	3	1%	24	6%	67	18%	277	75%
* By age 16 transition plan addresses <i>instruction, community, employment and daily life skills</i>	0	0%	2	1%	67	18%	305	82%
Student is informed prior to age 17 of his/her rights under IDEA	4	1%	3	1%	53	14%	315	84%
District has implemented a process to evaluate the success of a student's transition plan	119	33%	104	29%	83	23%	56	15%
Team, including student as appropriate, regularly assesses success of transition plan	66	18%	132	35%	109	29%	65	17%

Private Schools

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	No Evidence		Partial Informal/ Documentation		Complete or Formal Documentation		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Student participates appropriately in statewide assessments	2	8%	3	12%	12	48%	8
Student participates appropriately in district wide and school wide assessments	4	14%	4	14%	11	39%	9	32%
Alternate assessments are appropriately provided as needed	0	0%	3	13%	4	17%	17	71%
A variety of measures are used to assess student progress	0	0%	3	12%	21	84%	1	4%
<i>For Preschool only:</i> Multiple measures are available in the district to determine eligibility and measure progress	0	0%	0	0%	4	17%	19	83%
Team uses multiple measures and data to develop a student's IEP	0	0%	5	20%	20	80%	0	0%
Assessment data is used at the school level to improve student learning	3	12%	5	20%	17	68%	0	0%
Assessment data is used at the district level to improve student learning	2	9%	6	27%	5	23%	9	41%

Public Schools

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	No Evidence		Partial Informal/ Documentation		Complete or Formal Documentation		N/A	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Student participates appropriately in statewide assessments	3	1%	6	2%	259	69%	105
Student participates appropriately in district wide and school wide assessments	8	2%	16	4%	278	75%	68	18%
Alternate assessments are appropriately provided as needed	2	1%	22	6%	194	52%	154	41%
A variety of measures are used to assess student progress	0	0%	28	8%	339	92%	0	0%
<i>For Preschool only:</i> Multiple measures are available in the district to determine eligibility and measure progress	0	0%	8	2%	74	20%	284	78%
Team uses multiple measures and data to develop a student's IEP	1	0%	24	6%	343	92%	4	1%
Assessment data is used at the school level to improve student learning	11	3%	51	14%	290	79%	14	4%
Assessment data is used at the district level to improve student learning	30	8%	58	16%	225	62%	51	14%

It should be noted that the program approval management team also identified the following trends through the written reports on programs they visited:

- There has been an increase in the development of self contained, substantially separate programs, especially for children who exhibit challenging behaviors.
- High staff turnover in private special education schools is prevalent.
- Private special education facilities have the most difficulty obtaining certified staff.
- In the area of professional development we identified a need for additional training in the following areas:
 - * Using data to inform curriculum, assessment and instruction
 - * Teamwork and collaboration between general and special educators
 - * Mentoring and induction for special education teachers
 - * Transition planning and documentation of such planning at all levels
 - * Developing and aligning curriculum for severely involved students (especially at the high school level)
 - * Strategies for working with students who exhibit challenging behaviors
 - * Training for paraprofessionals and training for teachers in the supervision of paraprofessionals
 - * Writing of IEPs that align to the general curriculum

PATTERNS AND TRENDS: STATEWIDE ISSUES OF NONCOMPLIANCE IDENTIFIED
THROUGH THE CASE STUDY COMPLIANCE REVIEW PROCESS

SAUs

of SAUs Visited in 2002-03: 24

ED 1119.09 Facilities

10 SAUs were cited for having inadequate space and facilities for special education programming in one or more of their schools.

ED 1109.03 IEP Team

5 SAUs were cited for not having appropriately composed IEP Teams. This was related to not having teachers endorsed in the specific disability areas of the students involved.

ED 1109.01 Elements of IEP

7 SAUs were cited for having elements missing from IEPs, or having forms that do not meet state and federal special education rules and regulations.

ED 1119.08 Diplomas

6 SAUs were cited for not having policy and procedure related to issuing HS credits and diplomas for students with educational disabilities.

ED 1106.01 Special Education Process

4 SAU's were cited for not having updated policy and procedures.

(See Appendix for lists of 2002-03 Case Study and Yearlong Improvement Sites)

PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES:

of Private Schools Visited in 2002-03: 7

ED 1119.03

Equal Educational Opportunities/Full Access To the District's Curriculum

3 schools were cited for students not having full access to the general curriculum.

ED 1133.08 Qualifications and Requirements for Instructional, Administrative and Support Personnel

3 schools were cited for not having appropriately credentialed staff.

ED 1133.13 Physical Facilities

2 schools were cited for having inadequate space or inadequate facilities for the provision of services to students with disabilities.

ED 1133.05 Program Requirements

2 schools were cited for not having adequate supplies, materials, equipment and technology for the implementation of IEPs.

(See Appendix for lists of 2002-03 Case Study and Yearlong Improvement Sites)

APPROVAL OF NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A significant role of the management team is to work with the New Hampshire Department of Education in the oversight and review of SAUs and private schools requesting approval for start up programs, changes to existing approved programs or the development of new private special education schools. During 2002-03 the NHDOE experienced a substantial increase in the number of requests for approval of new programs. To be specific, it was anticipated that there would be requests for approval of 30 new programs requiring 25 follow up visits. In actuality, there were 63 applications submitted for approval of new programs. *(See Appendix for list of New Program Requests)*

In addition to the new requests received during the 2002-03 school year, several programs that initiated the approval process during 2001-02 required extensive technical assistance during 2002-03 before receiving approval. These included The VASE Program, Birchtree Center for Children, the DO-IT elementary program, Diamond Pond Academy and KellCole Academy. Also of note, several programs are included on the list that requested a significant amount of technical assistance, then chose not to pursue the approval process.

In reviewing the data collected around requests for new programs, a trend emerged toward SAUs establishing off site alternative programs and programs that are substantially separate from the general education setting. SAUs requesting approval for alternative schools included Berlin, Milford, Hudson, Portsmouth, Kearsarge, Haverhill, Claremont, Merrimack Valley and Dover.

In the area of preschool programming there were 13 requests for review of new programs: Monroe, Litchfield, Manchester, Belmont, Hear In New Hampshire, Hopkinton, Milton, Derry, Londonderry, Bedford, Dover, Monadnock Regional and Amherst.

As part of the approval process for all new programs, the management team is responsible for the review of all application materials and supporting documentation that includes, but is not limited

to, program descriptions, curriculum, budget and inventory of supplies, materials and equipment, policy and procedures, credentials of staff, and code enforcement inspection reports. In addition, visits are made to each site that submits all required application materials. The management team works with the NHDOE in the composition of all reports, correspondence and database tracking of all new programs and approval status of such programs. The 2002-03 school year has been a challenging one in the area of approval of new programs; an area that warrants continued attention.

WEBSITE

The Program Approval Website contains a “home” page of general information about the process. In addition, as outlined in the RFP, the website has been updated and all of the documents used in compliance review activities are available electronically. (*See appendix for samples of each document’s cover page.*) Districts may access these forms from the website and use them in preparation for the Case Study Compliance Reviews. The application materials for the Program Approval Process are available on the website as well. Information on each yearlong improvement team is posted. The challenge during the past school year has been for schools to provide the management team with electronic versions of their work for posting on the website. All of the program approval reports, once finalized, are listed on the website. The site also includes information on the management team.

SUMMARY

The NHDOE Program Approval Management Team continues to strive toward providing quality programming and services to all of our stakeholders. In order for us to accomplish this, we must continue to review, evaluate and analyze our roles as technical assistants to the field, the work we do, our evaluation strategy, and expectations from the NHDOE. To that end we must continue to view our ability to deliver services with a consistent and critical eye.

We are pleased with the large number of positive responses and feedback that we have received from the field regarding our work, yet we are also aware of areas that we need to improve upon. The data outlined in this report provides a picture in time of the work of the NHDOE Program Approval Management Team, and will help us with our continuous and ongoing planning.

The successful operation of the NHDOE Program Approval and Improvement Process can be attributed to the skills, expertise and experience of the management team. I want to especially express my sincere appreciation to them for their knowledge, enthusiasm and dedication to the NHDOE Special Education Program Approval and Improvement Process.

APPENDIX

1. Statistical Information
2. 2002-03 Program Approval Management Team List
3. Sample Letter For Recruiting Volunteer Team Members
4. Volunteer Form
5. Talking Points for the Case Study Compliance Review Orientation
6. Visiting Team Member Reactionnaire
7. External Team Member Reaction Graph
8. Visitor Orientation Manual
9. The Case Study Presentation
10. Countdown for the Case Study Compliance Review
11. Building Level Team Member Reactionnaire
12. Internal Team Member Reaction Graph
13. Building Level Orientation Manual
14. Case Study Site List for 02-03
15. Yearlong Site List for 02-03
16. Audit Visits 02-03
17. Corrective Action Visits 02-03
18. New Program Requests 02-03
19. Parent Survey
20. Parent Survey Instructions
21. Facilitator Session Agendas and Reactionnaire Sample
22. Informational Session Agendas and Reactionnaire Sample
23. LEA and Private School Profile Pages
24. Case Study Compliance Review Document Cover Pages
25. Calendar of 2002-2003 Program Approval Activities