Focused Monitoring Report for Barre Supervisory Union

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On-site Review: January 11-15, 2010

Student Support Division

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The Monitoring Team wants to thank everyone in the Barre Supervisory Union for being gracious and flexible hosts.

I. Description of Monitoring Authority and Focused Monitoring

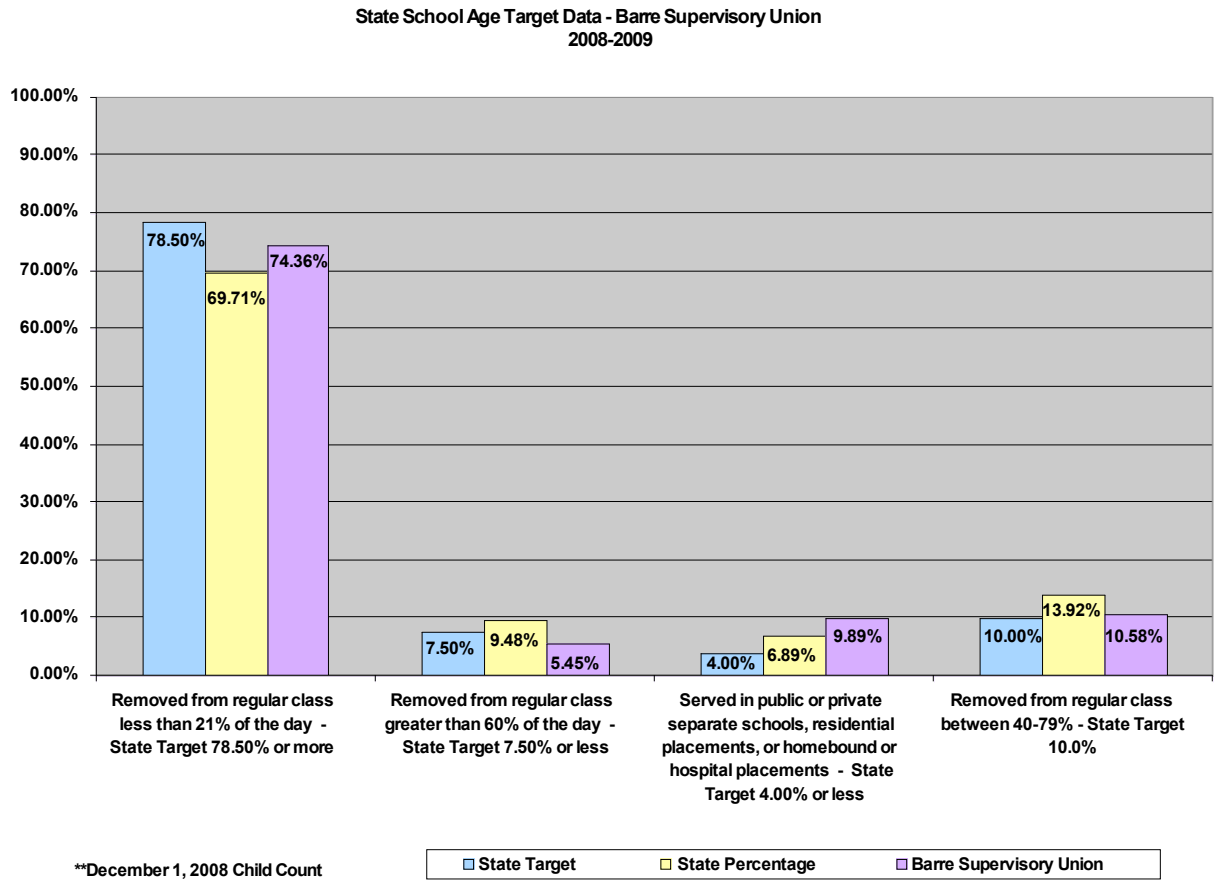
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (20 U.S.C. 1400 (c)(1)), provides federal funds to assist states in educating children with disabilities and requires each participating state to ensure that school districts and other publicly-funded educational agencies in the state comply with the requirements of IDEA and its implementing regulations. Further, Section 616 of IDEA states that the primary focus of Federal and State monitoring activities shall be on improving education results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities and ensuring that States meet the program requirements with a particular emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities. Vermont state law requires local education agencies to provide appropriate special education and related services and requires the Vermont Department of Education (VTDOE) to establish, monitor, and enforce regulations governing special education programs in the Vermont public schools and all institutions wholly or partly supported by the state. The state has adopted regulations implementing those requirements which are administered by VTDOE. VTDOE supervises and conducts the general supervision process in furtherance of the state's obligations under IDEA and Vermont law.

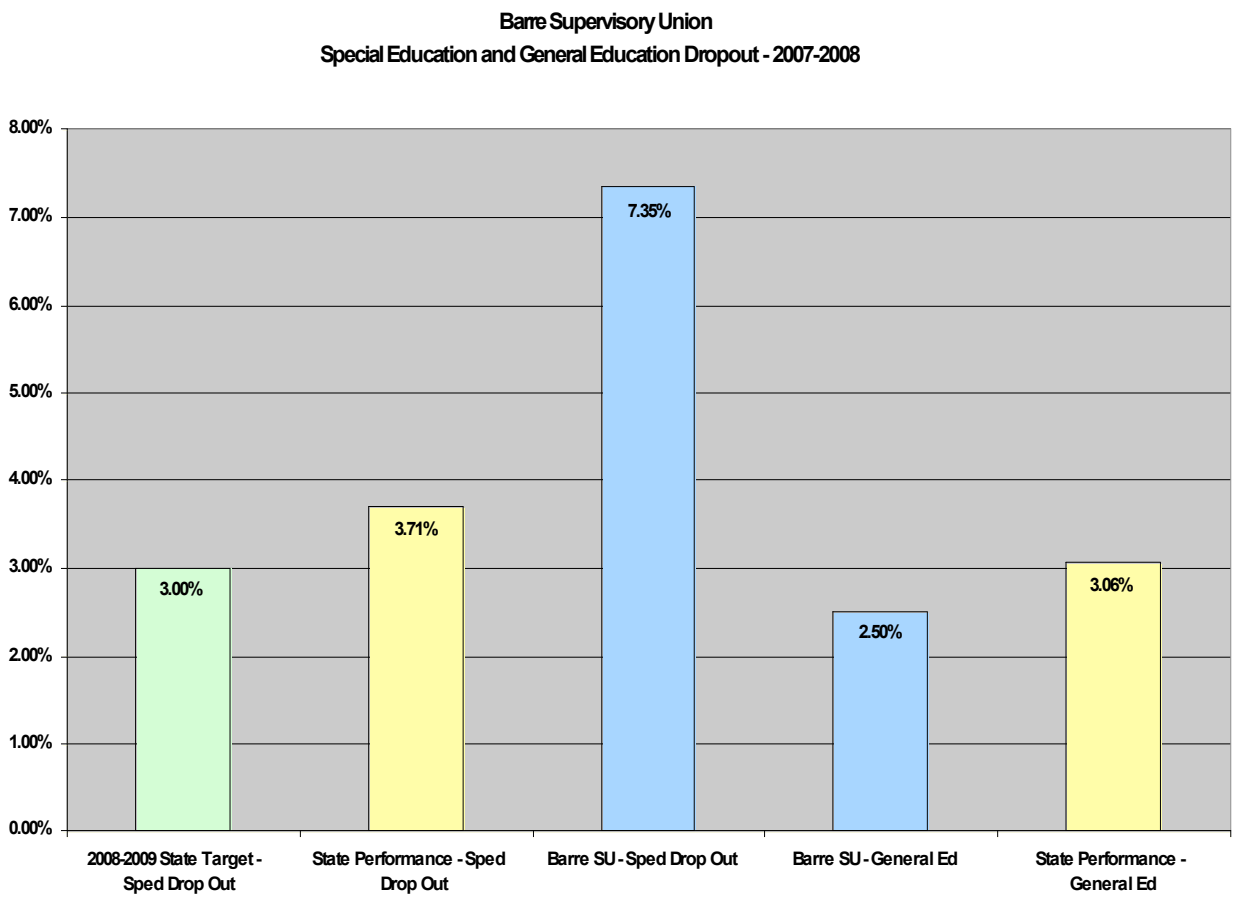
Focused Monitoring is a new approach to assess compliance with federal and state special education law and regulations while also addressing critical performance areas. It is a shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of accountability. It places the focus of a monitoring review on results versus process. The principles of Focused Monitoring are identified as follows:

- Focused Monitoring includes a limited number of priorities chosen by a diverse group of stakeholders.
- Available data are used to select priorities that will improve student educational performance, increase independence for children with disabilities, and lead to full participation in society.
- A limited number of indicators are identified within each priority area and are used as the basis for district ranking and selection for on-site reviews.
- A Focused Monitoring system is data and information-based. Data-based information is used to allocate limited resources in the direction of most need, which are determined by identifying what is most likely to lead to improvement in student performance.
- There is a relationship between monitoring and corrective actions—solutions are linked to identified problems. Corrective actions are designed to create systemic changes that result in improved student performance.
- Families have the opportunity to provide information on a continuous basis.

II. Focused Monitoring Methodology

The Barre Supervisory Union (BSU) was selected for an on-site visit based upon their performance on the State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicator(s) 5 and 6 regarding Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Indicator 2 regarding Drop Out. Barre SU was also selected as Barre School District (not SU) did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for students with disabilities. See the graphs below which documents the 2008-2009 state target, our average performance as a state and Barre Supervisory Union's performance in regards to the indicator(s):





The on-site Focused Monitoring review was conducted during the week of January 11-15, 2010. The team visited 2 EEE/elementary/middle schools and 1 high school and several programs located within the Barre Supervisory Union. The Monitoring Team reviewed and analyzed the following data prior to and during the on-site review.

Data Reviewed

- Indicator data by disability, grade, and school building
- LEA Profile
- Vermont Agency of Human Services Community Profile 2007
- Local Report of State Performance Plan indicators
- Special education policies/procedures/forms/practices
- Family/school collaboration related to the indicator(s) via parent survey monkey and parent interviews (in person and by phone)
- Student Handbooks
- Curriculum calendar
- Assessment results

Parent Survey and Input

A letter was sent to all parents of students (with disabilities and without disabilities) in the Barre Supervisory Union prior to the on-site visit. Included in the letter was a link to an online survey. Parents were asked to submit their responses to the survey prior to the on-site visit with their answers based on their families' experiences in the Barre Supervisory Union. BSU adequately and appropriately notified parents of the FM on-site visit. Twenty-one parents and students were either interviewed in person, over the phone, or submitted responses to the online survey.

On-Site Interviews

Interviews were conducted with nine general and special education administrators from the district schools and supervisory union levels fifteen general and special education teachers, twenty-one parents and students, and nine other personnel.

Record Reviews

Focused file reviews were conducted for 42 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504 Plans, Educational Support Team (EST) Plans and/or other related documents (i.e. student transcripts).

Classroom Observations

At least 15 classroom observations were conducted in each of the schools and preschool programs in the Barre Supervisory Union. Observations were conducted within both general education and special education classes and programs.

III. Supervisory Union Background

Within these towns there are two elementary/middle schools and one high school.

Barre Supervisory Union		
School Name	Grades Served	2009-2010 Approximate Enrollment
Barre City Elementary and Middle School	**Pre-K-8**	875
Barre Town Elementary and Middle School	**Pre-K-8**	873
Spaulding High School and Barre Technical Center	**9-12**	900

The following information is taken from the 2007 Agency of Human Services (AHS) Community Profile. The AHS profiles use supervisory union boundaries when presenting data for a particular community. According to the Agency of Human Services, the total population for this community in 2006 was 9,078 in Barre City and 8,077 in Barre Town. Thus, the information below is collected from Barre Town and Barre City which combined comprise the Barre Supervisory Union.

Percent of children (ages 0-4) in families receiving welfare (proxy for poverty) in 2006

	Barre Percentage	Vermont	Difference
Barre City	16.7%	9.1%	+ 7.6%
Barre Town	7.6%	9.1%	-1.5%

Percent of children (ages 5-17) in families receiving welfare (proxy for poverty) in 2006

	Barre Percentage	Vermont	Difference
Barre City	11.7%	4.3%	+7.4%
Barre Town	2.5%	4.3%	-1.8%

Percent of 12th grade students who have (see heading title) in the past 30 days in 2007

	Vermont	Barre Community City and Town Combined)	Difference
Smoked Cigarettes	25.0%	15.0%	- 10.0%
Smoked Marijuana	34.0%	25.0%	- 9.0%
Used Alcohol	55.0 %	55.0 %	+ 0.0%

Reports of child abuse and neglect per 10,000 children ages 0-17 in 2006

	Barre Percentage	Vermont	Difference
Barre City	247.9%	84.5%	+ 163.4%
Barre Town	32.8%	84.5%	-51.7%

2006 Custody rate for children (per 10,000 ages 10-17) deemed unmanageable:

	Barre Percentage	Vermont	Difference
Barre City	86.0%	28.5%	+ 57.5%
Barre Town	0.0%	28.5%	-28.5%

2006 Custody rate for children (per 10,000 ages 10-17) deemed delinquent:

	Barre Percentage	Vermont	Difference
Barre City	149.6%	52.7%	+ 96.6%
Barre Town	21.6%	52.7%	-31.3%

Socioeconomic Data:

	Average Annual Wage (2006)	***Median Family Income (1999)***	***Percent of People above poverty level (1999)***
Vermont	$34,974	$48,625*	90.6%
Barre City	$33,880	$42,660	87.0%
Barre Town	$33,880	$53,565	94.8%

* as measured by county, not community

IV. Commendations for the LEA

Relative to the State Performance Plan Indicator(s); Least Restrictive Environment (Indicators 5 and 6), Drop Out (Indicator 2) and AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) determinations for students with disabilities (no indicator, but a VTDOE priority), the following efforts and/or initiatives have been implemented by the Barre Supervisory Union. These activities have been recognized as effective components in BSU's system for improving student outcomes.

- There is a vision of a seamless K-12 curriculum within the supervisory union.
- The recent and on-going work on a unified K-12 curriculum is commendable. VTDOE encourages the supervisory union to continue this important work and urge BSU to consider extending the reach to include the **preschool** curriculum.
- The Phoenix program is recognized as a positive alternative pathway to graduation.
- Staff at Barre Town and Barre City recognize the need for a more structured and cohesive ESS and have begun the development of a new system.
- We are encouraged by the emerging "Tier 2" supports (systemic academic supports for any student such as after school English and math labs and homework club) at Spaulding.
- There is evidence of a strong inclusive philosophy (EEE-8) and practices (K-8) at Barre City and Barre Town Schools.
- Barre Town's EEE staff are beginning to discuss the expansion of preschool opportunities for children within Barre Town.
- There is evidence of emerging inclusive instructional practices at Spaulding.
- Each of the Barre SU schools has been purposeful in their decrease in numbers and reliance on paraeducators to serve students with disabilities.
- The EST process at Spaulding is well organized and the efforts are well documented.
- There is evidence of strong communication and collaboration between the kindergarten teaching staff and EEE staff at Barre Town.

- The JROTC is an elective available to all students.
- The Youth Services Bureau provides and supports various extracurricular opportunities for students from Barre Town and Barre City schools.

V. Triangulated Areas for Improvement (TAFI)

The Monitoring Team must validate a concern through three separate sources of data to determine that the concern is a Triangulated Area for Improvement. These triangulations of data make certain that the information is truly valid and reliable. BSU must respond to these areas of improvement in the improvement plan. Other issues or areas of concern (see Section VI of this report) that cannot be triangulated are identified, but they do not rise to the level of an area for improvement. The Barre Supervisory Union is encouraged to consider these issues and concerns within their Improvement Plan.

Finding I: The Educational Support System (including academic and behavioral supports) needs to be comprehensive and cohesive in all schools within the Barre Supervisory Union.

Supporting Evidence

1. There is a lack of collaboration, consistency, communication, and cooperation throughout the Barre Supervisory Union (between the grades, buildings, programs).
2. Spaulding has inadequate "Tier 2" supports at the high school (systemic academic supports for any student).
3. Spaulding has limited positive behavioral supports for all students.
4. There are few opportunities to engage and inform families of educational and community based resources.

Finding II: Spaulding High School's discipline and attendance practices are not conducive to engaging and retaining students through the completion of their high school program.

Supporting Evidence

1. Current attendance policies and procedures were not consistently implemented which may have been a contributing factor to changes in student placement and an increase in the number of students dropping out.
2. Many Post Secondary Transition plans lack the documentation required by State and Federal special education regulations.
3. Many Multi-Year Plans lack the documentation required by State regulations
4. The tracking by ability levels prevents students from fully accessing the general education curriculum with their non-disabled peers. This practice may contribute to student disengagement from school, lower academic achievement, truancy, behavioral challenges and ultimately, the potential for dropping out of school
5. There is a serious lack of communication and documentation of student data; including but not limited to: attendance, placement, detention, in school-suspension, out of school suspension, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, transcripts and Child Count related to drop-out. As a result, data in student records is neither valid nor reliable and educational decisions are based on anecdotal information rather than data.

VI. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

- The organization of the Special Education files needs to be addressed in order to be utilized effectively and efficiently by staff. The files must contain the most current information available; significant amounts of extraneous or outdated information should be expunged.
- Staff and family interviews reported that some students have recently been encouraged, advised or coerced to drop out of Spaulding.
- Staff and administrators reported a current over-reliance on contracted services through Washington County Mental Health.
- Transitions from program to program, grade to grade and building to building are in need of greater consistency and effectiveness for students with disabilities.
- There is a need for coordination of EEE and early childhood programs offered within the SU.

VII. Non-Compliance with State and Federal Rules & Regulations

Findings of Noncompliance

Non-Compliance findings are violations of state and/or federal rules and regulations. The following findings of non-compliance must be corrected within one year from the date of this report. Barre Supervisory Union must include a response to each these findings within their Improvement Plan.

<u>Individual and/or Systemic Findings of Non-Compliance:</u>

- Despite Barre Town's efforts to find an Occupational Therapist, OT services have not been provided after December 22, 2009. Compensatory services may be warranted (VT Special Education Rule 2363.3)
- When a suspension for a student with special needs is being considered, the administrator must consult the student's case manager prior to the suspension. (Rule 4313.1(b)(1))
- When students drop out of school, the school must notify parents/students of their right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) until they either graduate with a high school diploma or reach age 22. (Rule 2360.2(c))
- Special Education students at Spaulding do not consistently have Multi-Year Plans (MYP) that include a component explaining any exception to the graduation requirements and alternative requirements designed specifically for them. For students who are eligible for special education, a Multi-year plan shall be considered at a student's IEP meeting beginning with the IEP meeting to plan services for the year in which the student turns 14. (Rule 2120.2.1(c))
- Post Secondary Transition Plans for special education students at Spaulding lack age appropriate and measurable postsecondary goals that were based upon age appropriate assessments. Additionally, transition services, and/or appropriate courses of study were not referenced consistently. (Rule 2363.8(i))
- The Barre City EEE program is not an inclusive setting. According to Rule 2361.2(b)(4), IEP Teams must consider other community based placements when making placement decisions for EEE students.

- Rule 2361.1(b) states that at an elementary special education teacher must attend the IEP meeting when students from EEE are transitioning to Kindergarten. This requirement is currently not the practice in Barre City Elementary and Middle School.

VIII. Improvement Plan Process

Upon receiving the final report following a Focused Monitoring visit, the LEA is required to initiate the development of an Improvement Plan (which includes improvement activities related to the priority indicator and correction of non-compliance) with your VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator within a period of 30 calendar days from the date of the final report. The Improvement Plan should be a comprehensive, interdisciplinary plan that targets LEA-wide improvement. In developing the plan, the LEA should consider the "areas for improvement related to the indicators", "areas of concern related to the indicators," "findings of non-compliance," and the "supporting evidence," "corrective actions," and "required evidence of correction" contained within the findings. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator will provide technical assistance and consultation during the development of the Improvement Plan. It is important to note that improvement activities may extend beyond one year, but the correction of non-compliance must happen within one year from the date of written notification via the final report.

In order to assure that the Improvement Plan is comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and LEA-wide, the plan must be developed by a collaborative team which includes parents, as well as general and special education stakeholders. This plan must not be a uniquely special education response developed in isolation from other LEA initiatives. The VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator provides technical assistance to the team in the vein of a facilitator. The Monitoring Facilitator may not provide the technical assistance that the LEA identifies it needs, but rather functions as a liaison for needed services.

Development of the Improvement Plan will include:

- Use of the VTDOE template to develop the Improvement Plan
- Review the areas of noncompliance and the expected evidence of change in the final report
- Coordination of the Improvement Plan with other LEA initiatives
- Addressing the following components per activity:
- What specific tasks/activities are planned to address the targeted area?
- Why these particular tasks/activities were deemed most appropriate?
- When the tasks/activities will be completed?
- Who will complete the tasks/activities?
- Why this activity will work to bring the LEA into compliance?
- Who will monitor the progress and completion of activities?
- What are the needed resources (fiscal, human) within/outside the LEA that will be used to implement change?
- What are the deliverables, products, materials, documentation, or action plans that will be developed?
- How will progress be monitored to ensure that the expected changes take place (self-assessment) and
- What are the intended outcomes/impact related to the targeted area?

The VTDOE Monitoring Team reviews the LEA's proposed Improvement Plan, requesting clarifications and revisions, as necessary. Upon approval of the Improvement Plan, the LEA is issued an approval letter that outlines the schedule of reporting the LEA's progress monitoring to VTDOE. The purpose of this Monitoring Progress Report is to provide the LEA with a format in which to demonstrate evidence of their efforts to correct the deficiencies identified through the Focused Monitoring process. In addition, the process allows the LEA to monitor and evaluate the success of their Improvement Plan activities. The scheduling of the progress reports depends on the complexity of the Improvement Plan and the individual needs of the LEA.

Prior to the one year anniversary of notification via the final monitoring report, an Evidence of Change review meeting is scheduled between LEA representatives and the VTDOE Monitoring Facilitator to assess whether the LEA has met or is making adequate progress towards meeting the required evidence of change at the expected standard as set by the collaborative team and approved by the VTDOE. Based on the results of the meeting, the VTDOE determines whether (1) the LEA has met the standards required and the Improvement Plan is officially closed, (2) the LEA has not met the standards required and additional time will be allowed with Improvement Plan amendments, or (3) sanctions will be imposed. The correction of non-compliance must occur within the one year timeline, the above refers to improvement activities related to the priority indicator.