

VISITOR ORIENTATION MANUAL

New Hampshire Department of Education Special Education Case Study Compliance Review

2010-2011

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<p style="text-align:center">VISITOR ORIENTATION MANUAL NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION CASE STUDY COMPLIANCE REVIEW</p>

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to serve on a Special Education Case Study Compliance Review Visiting Team. We hope that you will find this experience to be as professionally and personally rewarding as it is intended to be. Serving on a visiting team is very important work, for you will be helping a New Hampshire private school improve its services to children.

This orientation manual is intended to provide you with background information on the Case Study Compliance Review Process prior to the scheduled visit. In previous years, the entire visitor orientation occurred at the beginning of the first day of the visit, leaving very little time for clarification and questions. Also, so much information was provided during the brief visitor orientation, that visitors often forgot specific instructions when the time came to participate in certain activities and complete certain forms. **It is our hope that you will read this manual and the enclosed forms, bring them with you to the visit and come to the visit prepared with questions that will make your participation more meaningful for you and your hosts.**

What is the Role of SERESC?

The SERESC agency (Southeastern Regional Education Service Center, Inc.) holds a contract with the New Hampshire Department of Education to administer the Special Education Program Approval Process. SERESC/NHDOE Special Education Program Approval Management Team consultants work together to administer the process, and one member of the team is assigned to chair each Case Study Compliance Review. The chair serves as technical assistant to the school or district undergoing program approval and helps the staff in that school or district prepare for the visit.

What is a Case Study?

Case studies represent the essence or heart of the review process. They tell the visitors about the work being done for students with educational disabilities by the staff in the organization. Several student cases in each building are randomly selected. For each student case selected, a team of special educators, general educators and related service providers prepares a portfolio that tells the student's educational story. The team gathers evidence to answer specific questions about the individual student and the work done by the school to support that student. The team then analyzes this evidence and prepares a student profile to provide the visiting team a snapshot of the student's educational experience.

In advance of the visit, the case study team members will prepare a case study presentation for the visiting team members. During the visit, this presentation will be followed by a discussion about the case between the presenters and the visitors, along with a review of the student profile and the evidence prepared by the case study team in the data collection sheet. The discussion is intended to fill in any gaps in the student's story and to provide clarification when necessary. These are very rich discussions from which all participants deepen their understanding of the student and the quality of the work being done to support that student. **All adults who work with this student should take part in the development of the case study presentation and, if at all possible, participate in the case study presentation.**

What is a Focused Review?

A focused review permits the Department of Education to leverage its impact for change and improvement within schools statewide by focusing the attention of all educators on three key areas of critical importance in the education of students with disabilities. The three areas that the Department of Education has determined to be in need of improvement are:

Access to the General Curriculum
Transition
Behavior Strategies and Discipline

In their case study presentations, case study teams will demonstrate evidence of their practice and compliance with state and federal special education rules and regulations in these key areas. If, during your visit, you should encounter an issue of non-compliance or a suggestion for improvement that is outside the scope of the focus areas, you should note it and be sure to include it in the final building summary of the visit.

Access to the General Curriculum: As a result of IDEA 2004 Amendments to the Special Education Law, students are guaranteed access to the general curriculum in the least restrictive learning environment (LRE). This means that identified students are entitled to access to the same curriculum standards as their non-disabled peers, and, to the maximum extent possible, they are entitled to instruction within the same setting as their non-disabled peers.

Transition: Transition points in a student's educational experience occur frequently and require careful planning so as not to interrupt the student's progress. Additionally, state and federal special education rules and regulations require documentation of transition planning at key points in the special education process. During the Case Study Compliance Review Process, educators are asked to examine their preparation for and documentation of the transitions of identified students leaving Early Supports and Services; entering school; moving from grade to grade, program to program, or school to school; leaving school and entering adult life. Student attendance at such team meetings will also be reviewed.

Behavior Strategies and Discipline: Behaviors by a student with educational disabilities that affect his/her ability to learn require positive intervention strategies and supports, and thus specialized staff training and planning, in order for the student to function successfully in the least restrictive environment. The case study process examines the procedures, strategies, training, planning and supports provided to students with educational disabilities who are in need of them. Interviews with administrators will elicit information about the host system's philosophy, policies and procedures with regard to behavior interventions and discipline practice.

In What Ways is the Case Study Compliance Review a Collaborative Process?

During the preparation of the case studies, the evidence gathering process involves all school personnel who work with that student. Special and general educators, related service personnel, parents, students and paraprofessionals meet together to respond to the questions on the Data Collection Form provided to them prior to the visit. General educators are required to participate in the case study presentations as time and schedules permit. This collaboration reinforces the common planning and teamwork between general and special educators that is required in order for a student with educational disabilities to succeed in a regular classroom setting.

The Case Study Compliance Review is also structured to promote collaboration between the host personnel and the visiting team members. During all review activities – case study presentations and discussions, classroom observations, and interviews – host personnel and visitors work together as a collaborative team. In this way, interviewees are made more comfortable and host personnel feel that they are actively involved in the review process. **They are part of the reviewing process rather than the subjects of an external inspection.**

What Does the Two-Day Schedule Consist of?

Orientation

All visiting team members will first meet as a group with the Executive Director and representative teachers and administrators from the school in a central location to receive instructions about the visit schedule and procedures. The Director of Special Education or the Executive Director will provide an overview of the school's programming, demographics, last program approval visit, improvement plan, corrective actions taken and other pertinent information. The Chair of the visit will review the packet of documents that you will receive at the orientation, and will answer any questions you may have after reading this manual. The orientation will take about an hour, after which you will follow a host representative to the building you will be visiting. Typically, two or three visitors will be assigned to each building.

Tour

Upon your arrival, your host will provide you with a brief tour of the building, in order to acquaint you with the school environment.

Case Study Presentation

You will next attend the first of several case study presentations which will tell you the story of a particular student. The presentation will provide evidence regarding the student's progress over the course of his/her schooling and the student's IEP. You will receive a copy of the Data Collection Form, including the student profile, with responses to a series of questions relating to the three focus areas and information about other aspects of the student's school life. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions about the student's programming and to clarify any questions you have about the evidence collected on the student by the staff.

The case study presentation and follow-up discussion will take about one hour to complete. You will then either listen to another case study presentation, observe the first case study student in class or interview that student's parent(s). Time will also be allocated in the schedule for the visiting team to review the materials presented to you. The case study presentations are the heart of the 2-day visit and provide the context for your feedback as a visitor. Visitors are encouraged to raise clarifying questions as part of the presentation, such as:

- What are _____'s academic strengths? Weaknesses?
- Describe _____'s academic progress since s/he was identified as having an educational disability.
- How does _____ react to a change in his/her program, teacher, schedule?
- Does _____ have any close friends at school?
- Does _____ attend and participate in his/her IEP meetings? (if a middle or high school student)
- What program changes would you like to see for _____?
- What have you learned from working with _____?
- How does _____'s behavior impact school performance?

At the conclusion of each case study presentation, the presenters and visitors will reach consensus on the level of service being provided to the student in each focus area.

Interviews

You and your visitor colleagues will interview the parents of the students of each case study prepared by your hosts. You will also interview the student if appropriate. It is expected that host staff members will accompany you and participate with you in each of the interviews you conduct. Included in this packet are the interview forms for each of these interviews. **Please use the forms only as guides, and do not feel obligated to get responses to every question.** Rephrase the questions as necessary to fit the flow of the conversation. Your most important consideration in the interviews will be the comfort level of the parent and the student. The interviews should each take about ½ hour, and you should try to adhere to what will be a tight and full 2-day schedule.

Classroom Observations

You will be asked to observe the student of each case study within the classroom setting. **Prior to the observation, please be sure to review the student's IEP.** You will find a form in this packet to assist you in taking notes on your classroom observation. Once again, this is intended only as a guide, and you should not feel limited by the questions raised in the form. Your purpose in the observation is to observe the student and the supports s/he is receiving, his/her interaction with peers, his/her level of engagement, etc. in as unobtrusive a manner as possible.

Building Level Compliance Data Summary

Finally, you, your visitor colleagues and some members of your host staff will collaborate in completing the Building Level Compliance Data Summary. This meeting will take place after lunch on the second day of your visit, and the form will probably require 1½ hours to complete. In this summary report you will attempt to make generalizations about the special education services being provided to educationally disabled students in each of the three focus areas and across the several case studies. Since this document, along with the summaries from the other buildings, will provide the basis for the report prepared by the Chair of the Case Study Compliance Review, it is very important that the summary be prepared with care and with the full involvement of all participants in the meeting. Information from classroom observations and interviews needs to be shared and integrated into the building summary. **We suggest that you keep this report in mind throughout your 2-day visit, and keep a running list of observed strengths and possible suggestions for improvements to bring to the discussion at this summary meeting.**

The person actually completing the Building Summary document for the collaborative team should be careful to write legibly in complete, clear sentences so that the Chair of the visit can convey the correct meaning in the final report.

Chair Interviews

During the time that you are occupied with case study presentations, classroom observations and interviews, the Chair will interview the Executive Director, a School Board member and the Director of Special Education to obtain a school-wide perspective. S/he will also review selected James O. files.

Visit Summary

After completing the building summary, and as the final activity of your visit, you will return to a central location with all the other visitors (and as many of the host staff as are able to attend) to report on your building summary. One member of your collaborative team (visitors and host staff) will be asked to provide a brief oral report on your team's findings – building strengths and suggestions for improvement.

Confidentiality

In order to protect the confidentiality of each of the students involved in the case studies, we ask that all forms and school data – observation, interview and portfolio information – be placed in a single envelope with the school's name on it. A coordinator from each building will be responsible for collecting this paperwork and giving it to the Chair at the conclusion of the visit.

Other Forms

You will be asked to turn in a mileage form to compensate you for your travel during the visit and a reactionnaire form to provide us with feedback on ways to improve the program approval process.

Professional Development

In the packet you will receive at the visit, you will find a professional development clock-hour certificate to credit you for your participation time.

Final Report

The Chair will use the collected data in the building envelopes to prepare a final report on the visit. A draft of this report will be sent to the Director of Special Education for questions and corrections, and a

final report will then be sent to the Special Education Bureau of the NH Department of Education. The State Director of Special Education will issue an approval letter to the host school for a specific time period of up to five years.

Enclosed Forms

Included with this manual for your review are the following forms, which will be used in the Case Study Compliance Review Process:

- Sample Completed Data Collection Form
- Sample Completed Building Summary Form
- Classroom Observation Form
- Parent, Student and Leadership Interview Forms

Many Thanks

The NH Department of Education Special Education Program Approval staff want to express our appreciation to you for your willingness to participate in this very important work on behalf of students with educational disabilities. Your gift of professional and personal time is going to help a NH private school improve its delivery of special education services. We hope that you will benefit personally and professionally from this experience by learning new approaches from your colleagues and by hearing the rich stories of how students are being served in another location. We are looking forward to working with you to improve special education in New Hampshire.

**Please Bring This Manual and All of the Program Approval Forms
With You to the Orientation/Training.**