

April 28, 2000

Mr. Russell Fletschock, Chairperson
West River Special Education Unit Board
PO Box 250
Rhome ND 58651-0250

Dear Mr. Fletschock:

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) Office of Special Education conducted a Verification Review in the West River Special Education Unit during February 15, 16, and 17, 2000 for the purpose of assessing compliance in the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and assisting your Unit in developing strategies to improve results for children with disabilities. The IDEA Amendments of 1997 focus on "access to services" as well as "improving results for children and youth with disabilities. In the same way, the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process implemented by NDDPI is designed to focus Federal, State and local resources on improved results for children with disabilities and their families through a working partnership among NDDPI, the West River Special Education Unit, parents and stakeholders.

In conducting its review of the West River Special Education Unit, NDDPI applied the standards set forth in the IDEA 97 statute and Part B regulations (34 CFR Part 300), as they were in effect at the time of the review. On March 12, 1999, the United States Department of Education published new final Part B regulations that took effect on May 11, 1999. In planning and implementing improvement strategies to address the findings in this report, the West River Special Education Unit should ensure that all improvement strategies are consistent with the new final regulations.

The enclosed report addresses strengths noted during the review, areas that require corrective action because they represent noncompliance with the requirements of the IDEA, and suggestions for improvements that will lead to best practice. Enclosed you will find an Executive Summary of the Report, an Introduction including background information, and a description of issues and findings. NDDPI will work with you to develop corrective actions and improvement strategies to ensure improved results for children with disabilities.

Thank you for the assistance and cooperation provided by the West River staff and Collaborative Review Steering Committee members during our review. Throughout the course of the review, Mr. Terry Tucker, Director of Special Education for the West River Special Education Unit was responsive to requests for information and assistance from NDDPI personnel. In addition, the West River Special Education Unit, under the administration of Mr. Tucker, has willingly participated as a pilot project site in the development of the revised North Dakota Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. Throughout this process, which began in 1998, both Mr.

Tucker and the West River Collaborative Review Steering Committee members have provided invaluable feedback to Department of Public Instruction personnel and to additional education personnel across the state.

Thank you for the continued efforts toward the goal of achieving better results for children and youth with disabilities in North Dakota. Since the enactment of IDEA and its predecessor, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, one of the basic goals of the law, ensuring that children with disabilities are not excluded from school, has largely been achieved. Today, families can have a positive vision for their child's future.

While schools have made great progress, significant challenges remain. Now that children with disabilities are receiving services, the critical issue is to place greater emphasis on attaining better results. To that end, we look forward to working with the West River Special Education Unit in partnership to continue to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Rutten
ND Director of Special Education

cc: Terry Tucker

Enclosure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WEST RIVER SPECIAL SERVICES UNIT

The attached report contains the results of the first two phases (Collaborative Review and Verification Review) of the North Dakota Continuous Improvement Monitoring of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, in the West River Special Services Unit during the 1998 – 1999 and 1999 – 2000 school years. The process is designed to focus resources on improving results for children with disabilities and their families through enhanced partnerships between the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), the West River Special Services Unit, parents and stakeholders.

Monitoring Activities

Several means were used in the monitoring process to gather data and review procedures and determine the extent to which the West River Special Services Unit is in compliance with federal and state regulations.

The Collaborative Review phase of the monitoring process included the completion of an extensive self-assessment under the direction of a local Steering Committee that provided further comments on the information. West River Special Services Unit identified seven self-assessment activities as part of its Collaborative Review:

1. Information regarding satisfaction with West River Special Services Unit services was requested from five agencies that also serve individuals with disabilities within the special education unit. These five agencies included:
 - The Protection and Advocacy Project
 - West Dakota Center for Independent Living
 - Key Infant Development Program (KIDS)
 - Badlands Human Services – Developmental Disabilities
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
2. A review was completed of the current West River Special Services Unit internal monitoring process.
3. Parents, students with disabilities, school staff, including special educators, general educators, and general education administrators, were surveyed regarding their satisfaction with West River Special Services Unit. Survey forms were adapted from models supplied by NDDPI.
4. The training needs of parents, staff, and administrators were analyzed through the use of Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) surveys.
5. Ninety (32%) of student files were reviewed for compliance with the IDEA utilizing a form supplied by NDDPI and expanded by the West River Special Services Unit.
6. Compliance worksheets supplied by NDDPI were used to analyze West River Special Services Unit compliance with the following six basic principles of the IDEA:

Zero Reject – This is the requirement that all children with disabilities be provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Nondiscriminatory Assessment – A child with a suspected disability must receive a full, individualized assessment, which meets specific standards, and includes information from a variety of sources.

Appropriate Education - An IEP team, which includes the child's teacher, the child's parent(s), an administrator, and a special education teacher, develops an educational program tailored to meet the child's unique needs.

Least Restrictive Environment – To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers. Placement decisions must be based on the goals and objectives.

Parent Involvement – Parents have the right to have access to their child's educational records; parental consent is required for initial evaluation, reevaluation, and placement; parents must be included in IEP team decisions; and, parents must be notified of their right to appeal.

Procedural Safeguards – Procedural Safeguards, which ensure the fairness of educational decisions, include impartial due process hearings; the right to an independent educational evaluation; written notification to parents explaining their rights; parental consent, and appointment of surrogate parents, when needed.

7. Programmatic issues were analyzed to ensure that data gathered through the self-assessment were reflective of all schools and programs within the unit.

In addition to the self assessment activities of the West River Special Services Unit, as part of the collaborative review NDDPI also reviewed the Unit's *Staff Guide*, staff members' teaching certificates and credentials, and the unit's internal compliance monitoring procedures.

The Verification Review conducted by the ND Department of Public Instruction included an on-site meeting with the West River Special Services Unit self-assessment steering committee and the Department's staff. Interviews with forty-two school administrators, general educators, special educators, and related service providers were conducted during the three days of the verification review on February 15-16-17, 2000. Focused reviews were made of twenty-one children's special education records following the compliance issues reported by the local Steering Committee.

The Department of Public Instruction staff members express their appreciation to the administrators, special and general education personnel, students and parents, and other agency personnel in the West River Special Services Unit who participated in the monitoring activities. Their efforts represent a commitment of time and energy without which the multipurpose task of monitoring could not be completed.

This report contains a description of the process utilized to collect data, and to determine strengths, areas of noncompliance with the IDEA, and suggestions for improvement in fully realizing the six basic principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities
Part B of IDEA

Strengths

The NDDPI Verification Review team identified the following strengths of the West River Special Services Unit:

- Highly respected, trusted, and accessible special education unit administrators.
- A high level of effective communication between general education and special education staff members.
- Dedicated and professional service providers, including paraeducators.
- Ongoing training opportunities for general and special educators.
- Appropriate and effective utilization of the NDDPI Traineeship process to secure and train essential personnel.
- A dynamic internal review process to ensure compliance with the procedural requirements of the IDEA.
- Appropriate utilization of building level support teams.

Areas of Noncompliance

The NDDPI Verification Review team observed the following areas of noncompliance:

- Incomplete documentation on evaluation planning forms and integrated written assessment reports (for students identified as learning disabled).
- Present levels of educational performance lack documentation of parent input.
- Annual goals are not measurable and individualized based on student need.
- Extended school year services are not always appropriately considered for children with disabilities who need such services in order to receive a free appropriate public education.

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INTRODUCTION

The West River Special Services Unit Self-Assessment report, completed in February 2000, describes the unit's recognition of its own responsibility for monitoring to ensure compliance with the IDEA. The self-assessment document further explains the recent changes in NDDPI's monitoring process resulting from the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA, 1993), and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) new continuous improvement monitoring process.

Essential background information about the West River Special Services Unit was incorporated in the self-assessment report. This large special education administrative unit covers most of southwestern North Dakota and includes twenty participating school districts. Demographic information in the self-assessment report reveals a total student population in the unit of 3612, down 280 students in a period of four years. It was also reported by the unit that one member school, Reeder, will dissolve as a school district at the end of the current school year. A significant personnel issue cited in the self-assessment report is that there is an annual twenty percent turnover of administrators in member schools as well as a twenty percent turnover of overall professional staff. The unit administrator reported that this results in a need for continual training relative to unit policies and procedures for complying with the IDEA.

The West River Special Services Unit report also identified its Collaborative Review Team/Steering Committee, the group that carried out the unit's self-assessment. The members of the Collaborative Review Team/Steering Committee included a parent of a child with a disability, a special education teacher, a general education high school teacher, a superintendent and past chairman of the West River Special Services Unit board of directors, a speech-language pathologist, a general education elementary teacher, and the Director and Assistant Director of West River Special Services. In addition to the core Collaborative Review Team/Steering Committee, separate meetings were held with other agencies serving individuals with disabilities located within the Unit, including the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project, West Dakota Center for Independent Living, Key Infant Development Program, Badlands Human Services – Developmental Disabilities, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Administrative Structures and Children Served: The West River Special Services Unit serves 321 students with disabilities (12-1-99 Child Count). Approximately 8% of the total student enrollment of member school districts are identified as receiving special education and related services. The local Steering Committee, after reviewing unit-wide data, concluded that students with disabilities are consistently integrated with nondisabled peers. The local Steering Committee made use of least restrictive environment (LRE) data comparisons over a four-year period.

Verification Review and Data Collection: The West River Special Services Unit began the Collaborative Review self-assessment process in November 1998. It is one of two special education units that agreed to pilot the revised monitoring process in collaboration with the NDDPI. The unit's student file reviews occurred during the summer of 1999, and the various surveys and meetings with other agencies took place during the 1999-2000 school year. The unit's self-assessment report was submitted to the NDDPI in February 2000.

The Verification Review team from NDDPI initially met with the West River Special Services Unit Steering Committee on Tuesday, February 15, 2000. At the meeting the unit's self-assessment report was discussed. Compliance issues, as identified by the Steering Committee, and questions, as identified by NDDPI, were discussed and analyzed. NDDPI personnel shared the areas of focus with the Steering Committee that would be the basis of the Verification Review. School districts to be visited during the Verification Review were identified. Following this meeting the Director of the West River Special Services Unit notified the administrators of nine school districts and one private school that Verification Review team members would conduct on-site monitoring activities within their districts during the three days of the visit. Student record reviews, including an analysis of Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans and Integrated Written Assessment Reports (IWAR), were conducted at the unit office as well as at several of the schools visited by NDDPI. Interviews were conducted in schools with seventeen special educators, twelve general educators, and twelve administrators for a total of forty-one separate interviews. Preliminary results and findings were presented to the Director of the West River Special Services Unit in a summary meeting at the conclusion of the Verification Review visit.

Improvement Planning: In response to this report, the West River Special Services Unit will develop an action plan including specific Improvement Strategies addressing areas identified as noncompliant, within 60 days of receipt of this report. The NDDPI special education regional coordinator assigned to the West River Special Services Unit will serve, as needed, as a resource for improvement planning purposes, and will respond in writing to indicate approval of Improvement Strategies submitted by the Unit.

I. ZERO REJECT

All children with disabilities must be provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). All children with disabilities, and who are in need of special education and related services, must be identified, located, and evaluated.

The West River Special Services Unit self-assessment report identified one area of concern regarding the early identification of children with disabilities. Through the self-assessment process a meeting was held with a representative of the Key Infant Development Program (KIDS) based in Dickinson, ND. This representative indicated that Child Find activities "continue to be a concern in rural areas. The majority of children receiving services through KIDS live in Dickinson. The screening program conducted by KIDS at area hospitals, and clinics has helped but numbers are still low for rural areas based on what could be expected." The NDDPI Verification Review team noted that it is not the responsibility of the West River Special Services Unit to identify children with disabilities younger than age three. Therefore, there is no compliance issue for the unit relative to this age group.

IDEA Part B Child Find obligations extend until students graduate from high school. Therefore it is the responsibility of the special education administrative unit to promote effective strategies to identify any school-age child who has a disability and may require special education and related services. This includes students who are at risk for dropping out of school. The Verification

Review team concluded that building level support teams (BLST) within the unit were generally active and effective. In interviews with one principal and one special educator, concerns were expressed about a “stigma” related to being identified as requiring special education services. This may result in some under identification of students with disabilities. However, in the school represented by these educators, it was reported that a basic skills teacher was employed to work with “fringe” or “at risk” students. This was reported to be a very successful process.

The Verification Review team noted that based on the December 1, 1999 Child Count, the percentage of children reported in the unit identified as emotionally disturbed was .93 percent compared to the statewide average of 7.15 percent. Upon further analysis by the West River Special Services Unit administrator, it was noted that the current (April 1999) Child Count reflects that 2% of children reported in the unit are identified as emotionally disturbed. The special education director for West River Special Services noted that this fluctuation in percentage of children identified as emotionally disturbed is affected by the following factors: transient residency of students and families across the unit; some students may be reported under Other Health Impaired and/or secondary to learning disabilities; and most school district offer intervention plans to address behavior issues.

During its initial meeting with the unit’s Steering Committee, the NDDPI reported that approximately 8% of the West River school aged population receives special education services compared to the 12-1-99 ND Child Count statewide average of 11.3%. The unit was not determined to be out of compliance relative to the principle of zero reject, however further analysis by the West River Special Services administration may be warranted.

STRENGTH

Building Level Support Teams are being consistently utilized throughout the West River Special Services Unit. During interviews conducted by NDDPI monitors, general educators described effective and efficient team activities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

Since both the West River Special Services Unit and the KIDS Program conduct Child Find activities, it is recommended that these two agencies consider collaboration for a unified process of child identification activities. The combined resources of both agencies would have the potential to create a stronger focus on the importance of early identification of disabilities in all children. The presence of the West River Special Services Unit Child Find efforts in the twenty member school districts of the unit could very effectively complement the KIDS Program early identification efforts for children younger than three, especially in the more rural areas of the region where identification rates are below what could typically be expected. The benefits of identifying various disabilities in any age child should be clearly communicated to the public. More intensive local media coverage of Child Find activities would enhance the effectiveness of this work. This would further serve to reduce the general public’s negative impressions of special education services that may inhibit referrals for evaluations.

II. NONDISCRIMINATORY EVALUATION

Any child with a suspected disability must receive a full, individualized evaluation that meets specific standards, and includes information from a variety of sources.

The West River Special Services Unit's self-assessment report indicated that student evaluation planning teams were not consistently completing individualized student profiles. The purpose of the student profile, as explained in *Guidelines: Evaluation Process* (NDDPI 1999) is to provide a comprehensive picture of the child; identify patterns of current student functioning; and indicate areas where further information is needed.

Through student file reviews and personnel interviews, the Verification Review team was able to verify the conclusions reached by the West River Special Services Unit self-assessment. NDDPI recognizes that the West River Special Services Unit did not begin utilizing the recommended student profile until the current school year.

Another evaluation issue identified by West River Special Services Unit as an area of noncompliance was that unit evaluation plans did not routinely include students' interests and preferences for transition-age students. Following the Verification Review, including focused student file reviews conducted on site, the NDDPI concurs with this finding.

Five areas of concern regarding required elements of integrated written assessment reports for students classified as learning disabled were identified by the West River Special Services Unit Steering Committee. The following five items were identified:

1. The report must note whether prior to referral for initial assessment, instruction provided was appropriate to age and ability.
2. The report must document an observation in the child's classroom.
3. The report must discuss the relationship between observation and academic functioning.
4. The report must document that discrepancies are not attributable to other causes (sensory, other disabilities).
5. The report must address the effects of economic, cultural, or environmental disadvantage.

The Verification Review team, through student file reviews and interviews with staff, noted that the documentation of instruction prior to referral was not found in the integrated written assessment reports of students identified as learning disabled. The relationship of observations to academics was not included, and appropriate observations were not documented. The files reviewed did not contain documentation of relevant medical information, and documentation was missing that the disability was not due to a lack of instruction.

One additional concern regarding the evaluation process was identified by the Verification Review team. Through interviews with personnel it was reported that it sometimes takes up to three months before the results of evaluations conducted by the unit can be considered by the assessment team. This can unnecessarily delay the beginning of appropriate special education and related services.

AREA OF NONCOMPLIANCE

Incomplete Documentation on Evaluation Planning Forms and Integrated Written Assessment Reports (for students identified as learning disabled).

NDDPI *Guidelines: Evaluation Process* (8/1/99) includes suggested procedures and forms to meet requirements of the assessment planning process and development of the integrated written assessment report (IWAR). Following these procedures will ensure compliance with 34 CFR 300.553, *Determination of needed evaluation data*, and 34 CFR 300.532, *Evaluation procedures* (including the IWAR). It was noted by NDDPI monitors during review of student assessment plans that consideration of student interests was not documented for students of transition age, and that the integrated written assessment reports for students identified as learning disabled did not contain documentation of required elements.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

The evaluation process compliance concerns identified by both the West River Special Services Unit and NDDPI were primarily limited to students of transition age and to students identified as learning disabled. It will benefit special education personnel in the West River Special Services Unit, especially those working with older students and those involved in the evaluation of students identified as learning disabled, to participate in ongoing training on the evaluation process. The unit would benefit from its own study regarding the length of time it is taking for evaluations to be completed. If it is determined that this is limited to certain districts or specific individuals, steps should be taken to expedite the process.

III. FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION

An IEP team, which includes the child's teacher, the child's parent(s), an administrator, and a special education teacher, must develop an educational program tailored to meet the child's unique needs.

The West River Special Services Unit self-assessment report identified three concerns regarding the individualized education plans (IEPs) of unit students:

1. Progress reporting to parents.
2. Extended school year services
3. Parent participation documented in the present levels of educational performance.

The West River Special Services Unit utilizes the state recommended *Guidelines: Individualized Education Program Planning Process* (8/1/99). In addition, local training was provided to unit personnel in the fall of 1999.

During interviews that NDDPI conducted as part of the Verification Review, respondents were asked to describe the IEP development process. Specific questions related to present levels of educational performance, annual goals and desired ending levels of performance, characteristics of services, and the process for determining extended school year services for students. Since the

determination of need for and the provision of extended school year services is an issue for schools across North Dakota, and has also been identified as an area of concern by the Office of Special Education Programs during their most recent monitoring of North Dakota, this issue was emphasized during interviews with school personnel. Student file reviews completed by NDDPI monitors also included the IEP components indicated above as areas of concern, including documentation of the discussion regarding the need for extended school year services.

The NDDPI Verification Review team also scrutinized transition planning for students 14 years of age and older, and investigated the kinds of interventions and strategies used to support students with emotional or behavioral problems.

NDDPI monitors reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following areas of noncompliance.

AREAS OF NONCOMPLIANCE

1. Present Levels of Educational Performance

CFR 300.347 Requires that an IEP contain a description of the student's present levels of educational performance and that it reflects the perspective of all team members, including the parents. The West River Special Services Unit self-assessment report identified present levels of educational performance as lacking documentation of parental input. NDDPI identified that parents were consistently invited to IEP meetings and did attend. However, the Verification Review team concurs with the West River Special Services Unit Steering Committee that parental input is not consistently noted in students' IEPs.

2. Measurable Annual Goals

34 CFR 300.347 requires that goals be measurable and include short-term objectives intended to meet the child's educational needs that result from the child's disability. NDDPI Verification Review team members identified IEP annual goals that were very broad, general in nature, and not individualized.

3. Extended School Year Services

34 CFR 300.000 requires that a free appropriate public education be made available to all children with disabilities. 34 CFR 300.13 requires that services be provided in accordance with an appropriate IEP. In addition, 34 CFR 300.309 states that extended school year services must be available as necessary in order to provide free appropriate public education to children with disabilities. Through interviews with school personnel and student file reviews of IEPs, the NDDPI Verification Review team determined that extended school year services (ESY) are not always appropriately considered for all children with disabilities who need such services in order to receive a free appropriate public education. The West River self-assessment report indicated that "case managers were not consistently stating the justification for extended school year services in the IEP."

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

IDEA '97 contains a new requirement, CFR 300.347. This regulation requires a reporting of student progress to parents of children with disabilities “at least as often as the parents of nondisabled children receive reports of student progress.” It was evident that West River Special Services Unit personnel are in varying stages of fully implementing this new regulation. In some schools within the unit it was reported to be consistently occurring. NDDPI Verification Review team members also were told by school personnel that this was not consistently occurring, most notably with secondary students.

The West River Special Services Unit has developed a new form for reporting student progress. Special educators within the unit reported that it has improved the communication regarding individual student progress on goals and short-term objectives. This form has also improved communication about student progress with general education teachers. One special educator who expressed satisfaction with West River Special Services Unit’s new student progress reporting form, indicated that general education teachers formerly never knew what students with disabilities were doing relative to their goals and short term objectives. She stated, “Now we report it regularly to general education teachers and it’s easier for them to understand what’s happening.”

The Verification Review team concludes that the West River Special Services Unit’s Steering Committee was correct in identifying this issue as an area of noncompliance at the time data was being gathered. However, since that time the unit has taken appropriate steps to fully implement this new requirement and it was evident to the NDDPI monitors that substantial progress is being made. NDDPI recommends that the administration of West River Special Services Unit continue to carefully monitor the consistent and appropriate reporting of student progress by unit personnel for all ages of students.

The NDDPI Verification Review team reviewed transition components of several IEPs for students 14 years of age and older, and interviewed unit personnel working with these students. NDDPI monitors noted that transition sections of the IEP tend to be incomplete and do not yet reflect a true picture of the transition planning process. While the transition planning process, along with appropriate documentation, appears to be an emerging skill for West River Special Services, NDDPI recommends that continued improvement planning in this area remain as a priority for the unit. West River Special Services should also consider developing stronger collaborative relationships with Developmental Disabilities, Job Service, Dickinson State University Support Services, and Independent Living Centers. This will ease some of the planning burdens placed upon the schools and encourage student connections to additional resources.

IV. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities must be educated with their non-disabled peers. Placement decisions must be based on the goals and objectives in the child’s IEP.

The West River Special Services self-assessment report noted that a review of multiple sources within the unit indicated that a full continuum of services is made available to students with disabilities. West River Special Services utilizes a continuous internal monitoring process to review placement decisions recorded on student IEPs. The West River Special Services Steering Committee reviewed LRE data comparisons over a four-year period and concluded that students with disabilities are consistently integrated with non-disabled peers. NDDPI monitors did not find any indications that LRE is an area of noncompliance for the West River Special Services Unit.

V. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents have the right to have access to their child’s educational records. Parental consent is required for initial evaluation, reevaluation, and placement. Parents must be included in IEP team decisions, and parents must be notified of their right to appeal.

The West River Special Services self-assessment report summarized responses from parent surveys conducted as part of the Collaborative Review process. Based on the analysis of returned parent surveys, the West River Special Services Steering Committee identified no specific concerns relating to parent involvement. The Steering Committee did include an improvement strategy to encourage and improve parent and student participation in the IEP process, including transition planning. The Steering Committee also noted that information provided through other stakeholder sources indicated a need to improve parent participation in workshops and area training activities.

Additional parent involvement issues, including progress reporting to parents, and parent participation in development of present levels of educational performance, were previously addressed in this report in Section III. Free Appropriate Public Education.

Information obtained from a ND Protection and Advocacy Project representative indicated that parents do not always feel that they are “equal” team members with regard to IEP development. In addition, it was noted that some administrators do not appear to understand some parent concerns or are willing to work with parents to resolve issues.

NDDPI identified the following suggestions for improvement.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

NDDPI monitors did not identify participation by parents as an area of noncompliance. However, the administration of West River Special Services is encouraged to continue improvement planning activities that will result in an increased level and quality of involvement of parents and families in the special education process. Parental involvement has long been recognized as an important indicator of a school’s success and parent involvement has positive effects on children’s attitudes and behavior. Partnerships with parents will positively impact student achievement and benefit school personnel as well.

VI. PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS

Procedural Safeguards, which ensure the fairness of educational decisions, include impartial due process hearings; the right to an independent educational evaluation; written notification to parents explaining their rights; parental consent; and appointment of surrogate parents, when needed.

Information included in the West River Special Services self-assessment report summarized data from an internal monitoring process of student file review. The Steering Committee noted a concern regarding the completion of the Record of Inspection form placed in student files. The Director of West River Special Services reported that the Record of Inspection form was revised and training provided to all staff during the fall of this school year. In addition, the Parent Prior Written Notice form was located in only 74% of the 90 student files reviewed during the self-assessment process.

Student file reviews completed by NDDPI monitors during the Verification Review process included specific items for the Record of Inspection form and the Parent Prior Written Notice form. Both forms were reviewed for accuracy of completion and placement in student files.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and determined that West River Special Services is in compliance with both of these requirements. Both the Record of Inspection form and the Prior Written Notice form was found and completed correctly in all student files reviewed by NDDPI monitors.

STRENGTH

The West River Special Services Unit's ongoing implementation of an internal monitoring system is a strength of the unit that will ensure compliance with the procedural requirements of IDEA. The administration of West River Special Services, along with the staff of special education teachers, are to be commended for their commitment to this process.