

# CDE Verification Review

## The Verification Review

In 1999, the California Department of Education (CDE), Special Education Division (SED), initiated Verification Reviews as one tool in the Focused Monitoring and Technical Assistance (FMTA) process of assessing school districts' compliance with special education laws.

Consultants within the CDE-SED were reassigned to form geographic teams to coordinate all monitoring and technical assistance activities for their assigned counties, districts, and Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs). Consultant activities within the Verification Review process consist of reviewing student records; onsite interviews with parents, staff, and administration; a parent/guardian input meeting; a review of district policies and procedures; and a review of district service and outcome data.

The SEEDS Project, under the terms of its 2000-01 contract with the Department of Education, participated in three of the Verification Review activities: the Pre-Review meeting, the Parent/ Guardian Input Meeting, and Review of Student Records. CDE has proposed that SEEDS participate in post-review meetings in the coming year.

## The Pre-Review Meeting

In preparation for the onsite monitoring, FMTA teams hold a pre-review meeting in which relevant data is compiled and analyzed for questions and trends of non-compliance. The team examines data drawn from sources such as the California Special Education Management Information system (CASEMIS); district status on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and the district's complaint and fair hearing history.

Questions for the onsite review period are generated from this data which form the basis of the FMTA team's monitoring plan. Data from the onsite review provides answers to these questions, resulting in modification of the monitoring plan. Thus the monitoring becomes a dynamic process with opportunities for greater individualization.

### The Post-Review Meeting

Following the monitoring visit, the the FMTA team's lead consultant conducts a post-review meeting to design the corrective action plan and to develop the appropriate follow-up visits and technical assistance to the school district.

### The Parent Input Session

In 2000-2001, CDE introduced the parent/guardian input meeting as a mechanism for bringing forward the perspectives and experiences of parents and guardians as part of the verification review. At the beginning of the review, participants at this meeting inform the monitoring team of additional areas of suspected non-compliance according to specific themes, as well as provide an awareness of other issues important to families. The meetings are required under the Supplemental Budget Report to the legislature.

The Special Education Division's Verification Review Training Materials (October 2000) outline the content, design, format, and methods of the input session. In summary, the meeting may provide the review team with information not available through other, more qualitative sources. The information gained may verify or contradict information obtained from other activities, and thus, result in a modification of the

monitoring plan. The meeting may reveal the relationships, roles, and perceptions of parents with regard to district operations and procedures.

### Review of Student Records

The Verification Review Training Materials delineate the procedures for student record reviews. The records are randomly selected and provide information on compliance with state and federal law. Two types of forms are used for assessing compliance: age forms and supplemental topic forms. Record review is completed by the CDE monitoring team, school district staff, and consultants from training and technical assistance projects. Beginning in 2000-01, the list of records to be reviewed was no longer issued to districts in advance of the review.

### Scope and Sequence

The CDE Special Education Division completed 55 Verification Reviews throughout California between November 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001. The SEEDS Project utilized four staff members, two Core Consultants, and eleven Specialized Consultants in assisting with record reviews and moderation of parent/guardian input sessions in this time period. Seven new Specialized Consultants were recruited, trained, and assigned to monitoring visits between March 9 and April 10, 2001. During this time the SEEDS staff, in conjunction with CDE, developed materials, revised the meeting protocol, and developed strategies to meet the challenges of language access unique to each school district.

### Recruitment of Additional Parent Moderators

Continuing recruitment of parent moderators will be conducted throughout California in the coming year. Interested parents may be located through the system of nine Parent Training and Information Centers throughout the state. Additionally, potential moderators may come from parent groups which represent under-served groups such as the four California Community Parent Resource Centers. New parent moderators will require much training and peer assistance. The SEEDS Project Specialists will be responsible for the recruitment, training, and coaching of these new Specialized Consultants. A statewide bank of parent moderators who reside near the district under review may better understand the local community, and prove more cost-effective for SEEDS. A parent moderator will not facilitate an input session in his or own district of residence or service.

### Information from Families

The information provided by families at the parent/guardian input sessions could be summarized as themes. Parents expressed concern about the lack or quality of placement options and about elements of service delivery such as insufficient numbers of qualified personnel and the ability to plan for transition. They were concerned about aspects of participation in general education such as acceptance of their student by other children and teachers and sufficient support for teachers and instructional assistants. However, one of the areas of greatest concern, lack of access to information, emerged as a key finding to both CDE consultants and parent moderators. While related to the compliance theme of Parent Involvement, the degree of misinformation and lack of

information on the part of parents prompted the moderators and consultants to consider training and technical assistance avenues to meet this need, immediately and in the long term. The post-review meetings provide an opportunity for SEEDS to participate with FMTA teams in designing technical assistance.

### Results of Family Evaluation

Parents were asked to evaluate six aspects of the meeting. Participants were asked whether:

- they received the notice in a timely manner,
- their concerns and opinions were heard,  
the purpose of the meeting was clear,
- the moderator's questions were clear,
- the printed materials were helpful, and
- whether they felt that the information gathered would be used to improve child's education.

83% of respondents felt they received the notice in a timely manner. Timeliness of the meeting notice varied by district and was reported to be influenced by the method of delivery, e.g. by U.S. mail or in the student's backpack. A better measure of timeliness and impact of the meeting would stem from an interview of parents who did not attend—was lack of sufficient notice a barrier to participation? The mean score for timeliness of meeting was 3.43 on the four point scale.

90% of parents reported that their concerns were heard at the meeting, with a mean score of 3.43—again, a positive result. Using parents as moderators was predicted

to increase the participants trust and willingness to share based on the guidance of someone with a similar perspective. Although the number of respondents is small, this sense of trust seems to have occurred and is also reported anecdotally by parent moderators.

89% of parents felt they understood the meeting's purpose and 94% of parents felt the moderator was clear. This was an area of emphasis by the CDE lead consultant and the parent moderator throughout the meeting. The posters were developed to enhance the participants' understanding of the meeting focus and as an easy reference when questions arose. The mean score for understanding the meeting's purpose was 3.52 and the mean score for moderator clarity was 3.62, the highest score of the evaluation.

83% of parents responding felt that printed materials were useful. Parents reported that the print on the posters was too small to read. Some parents expressed appreciation for the Local Resource Page, while others reported that they were already familiar with the information. The mean score for the value of print materials was 3.28.

78% of respondents felt their child's education would be improved as a result of the input session. The mean score of 3.23 and the percentage of 78% comprise the lowest score of the evaluation, although still a positive result.

#### For the Future...

This year's participation in verification reviews has provided SEEDS with rich information. Staff, moderators, and consultants have increased knowledge of special education law, and of the areas of state and federal concern regarding compliance. We have gained insight into what parents think about special education. We are developing

skills and tools to better elicit this information in large group forums and we are beginning to examine what this information means. We are developing questions based on what did not happen, and who did not attend various activities. We have had the opportunity to participate as partners with CDE monitoring teams, as they thoughtfully prepared a multi-faceted and dynamic monitoring plan. We look forward to the coming year as one that builds on the experiences and relationships developed during this past year.