

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Mercer County Special Services School District (MCSSSD)

County: Mercer

Monitoring Dates: September 30, October 7, 13, 18, 19, 20, 2004

Monitoring Team: Carmen Fanucci, Elaine Lerner, Karen Fruman, Debbie Magee, Denise Wilkens, Barbara Groff, Dolores Walthers

Background Information:

During the 2003 – 2004 school year, the Mercer County Special Services School District (MCSSSD) conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the MCSSSD with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The MCSSSD developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

During the monitoring process, the monitoring team reviewed receiving school documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in IEPs, staff evaluations, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students/ teachers/related service personnel, and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with the receiving school's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The MCSSSD provides a Home Program for parents of students diagnosed with autism. The training focuses on teaching parents the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis. Home sessions address such issues as toileting, sleeping, mealtime and participation in community activities.

The MCSSSD also provides Integrated Learning Opportunities. The school has partnered with the Hamilton YMCA on a project which is designed to provide students the opportunity to work along side typically developing peers. The program emphasizes

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social development and appropriate behaviors. Functional Academic Programs focus on hands-on and real life skills. The Community Based Instruction Program reinforces those skills taught in the classroom in the community setting. Students who participate in this program take weekly trips into the community to practice reading, math, safety and social skills. Trips to nearby malls, restaurants, supermarkets, discount stores and convenience stores offer the students multiple opportunities to practice skills in different situations. As a result of this program, families report that their children are able to more actively participate in family outings and activities.

The school also works with a consultant from the College of New Jersey to implement an accountable system of instruction for cognitively impaired students. Training topics include direct instruction techniques, data collection and age appropriate curricula. The theme of "Emergent Literacy" and developing access skills using assistive and augmentative communication devices has been key to this initiative.

MCSSSD has entered into a partnership with Trenton Public Schools in the identification and transition of students from separate facilities to supported general education programs for at least 40% of the school day. Implementation activities include professional development activities that focus on collaborative planning, implementation of improvement plan activities, curricular adaptations and modifications, and assistive technology.

In addition to the five schools operated by MCSSSD, there are a number of shared services which they provide to LEAs. The purpose of these shared services projects is to provide LEAs with highly specialized services in a cost efficient manner. The services include Project Child Assessment Service, Assistive Technology Center, Community Resource Team, Integrated Preschool Project, Project ADULTS and Mercer County Transportation Service.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions, FAPE, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Discipline and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the MCSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the MCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, the MCSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding implementation of IEP components relating to measurable goals and objectives and documentation of transition services. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of

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records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the MCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication and nursing services and policies and procedures relating to school functions and services.

During the self-assessment process, the MCSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the MCSSSD on September 30, October 7, 13, 18, 19, 20, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the MCSSSD report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

The receiving school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the receiving school was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that was sufficient to bring about systemic change. The receiving school is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, all of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the receiving school is commended for the many areas that were determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

General Provisions, FAPE, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Discipline, and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the MCSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the MCSSSD during self-assessment and verified during the on-site visit include class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication and nursing services, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, the MCSSSD identified areas of need regarding implementation of IEP components relating to measurable goals and objectives, documentation of transition services and teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs.

The MCSSSD is not required to submit revisions to their improvement plan since all areas of noncompliance have been identified and corrected by the school.