

**New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Receiving School Monitoring**

Receiving School: Essex Valley School **County:** Essex

Monitoring Dates: June 9 and 10, 2005

Monitoring Team: Greg Margolis, Ann Marie Bruder, Zola Mills, Mark Lanzi

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Essex Valley School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Essex Valley School 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 Essex Valley School 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 Essex Valley 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 Essex Valley School's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The Essex Valley School is commended for its extensive degree of counseling support and comprehensive behavior management program. Both of these services provide students with considerable opportunities to explore and more effectively manage their behavior and emotions. The counseling program also infuses comprehensive transition planning activities that begins as soon as the student enrolls at the school. The program also integrates considerable support for faculty and staff including two, daily faculty meetings, regular in-service training and assistance to participate in outside professional development activities.

The Essex Valley School provides students with considerable opportunities to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities both at the receiving school and within their home districts. Students at the Essex Valley School may participate in a variety of clubs

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and activities during a specific period each day. Examples of these activities include use of the gym/weight room, computer activities, and student leadership clubs. The school also has an interscholastic basketball team and cheerleading squad and actively works with sending school districts to facilitate students' participation on athletic teams and activities in their home districts.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

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

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Essex Valley School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, criminal history verification and having an approved professional development plan.

During the self-assessment process, the Essex Valley School identified concerns in the areas regarding certified/licensed staff. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Essex Valley School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, 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.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP goals and objectives and current IEP prior to service delivery.

Area of Need:

IEP Meetings Conducted with Required Receiving School Participants – During the on-site visit, through staff interviews and record reviews it was determined that IEP meetings conducted at the school are scheduled when special education teachers are not available to participate. The school has adopted a practice of holding a pre-IEP meeting in which the teachers present their input to the school's director who then reports this information at the IEP meeting.

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- **The Essex Valley School must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that required staff members participate in IEP meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Signatures of Participants Present on IEPs – During the on-site visit, through record reviews it was determined that signatures of required meeting participants are present on IEP documents. However, staff interviews found that because special education teachers do not attend IEP meetings, these signatures are obtained after the meeting has occurred.

- **The Essex Valley School must revise its improvement plan to develop procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that only the signatures of those meeting participants who actually attended IEP meetings are present on the final IEP document.**

IEP Goals and Objectives – During the on-site visit, through staff interviews and record reviews, it was determined that although it is not the receiving school's responsibility to do so, Essex Valley School staff provides IEP annual goals and objectives to the IEP team. While the goals and objectives are aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, they are not consistently individualized and they lack criteria for being observable and measurable. Furthermore, for certain subjects, such as US History, Physical Education and Health, the inserted pages reiterated the curriculum for these areas, rather than reflected actual goals and objectives.

- **The Essex Valley School must revise its improvement plan to either offer IEP teams goals and objectives that are individualized, observable and measurable or communicate with the sending district to ensure that the IEP team revises the goals and objectives provided by the Essex Valley School to make certain that they are individualized, observable and measurable.**

Current IEP Prior to Service Delivery- During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that although the Essex Valley School has developed and implemented procedures to obtain current IEPs, there is frequently a significant delay between the date of the IEP meeting and the date that the school obtains a copy of the current IEP. In several instances, student's current IEPs reflected district-based programs or other receiving schools.

- **The Essex Valley School must revise its improvement plan to develop additional procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure that all students have current IEPs reflecting their program at the Essex Valley School.**

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Essex Valley School 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, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, and medical exams for sport teams.

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During the self-assessment process, the Essex Valley School identified concerns in the areas regarding certifications for specialized populations. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site regarding dispensing medication and nursing services.

Area of Need:

Nursing Services/Dispensing Medication – During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the Essex Valley School does not employ a properly certified school nurse or possess a nursing services waiver that addresses the requirements outlined by N.J.A.C. 6A:16-2.1(e). Staff interviews found that the present nurse employed by the school only holds a license as an LPN and does not receive daily supervision by either a fully school certified or non-certified school nurse. In addition, in the event that the school nurse is absent, the school has no provision for providing a properly certified substitute.

- **Within 45 days, The Essex Valley School must ensure that the school employs a fully certified school nurse. In addition, the school will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the required full range of nursing services is provided by employing a full time certified school nurse. The school may request a waiver of full time status through the Regulatory Equivalency and Waiver Process in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:5-1.1. The school must also include procedures to ensure that students are administered medication by authorized individuals in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-2.3(b)1 when the nurse is absent.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Essex Valley School on June 9 and 10, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Essex Valley School's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the Essex Valley School's improvement plan.

The receiving school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the receiving school was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The receiving school is further commended for the many areas determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

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

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the Essex Valley School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, criminal history verification, having an approved professional development plan, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with students, age 14 and older, as appropriate, 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, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Essex Valley School identified areas of need regarding certified/licensed staff and certifications for specialized populations (blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing).

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP goals and objectives, current IEP prior to service delivery, dispensing medication and nursing services.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Essex Valley School will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the county office of education and to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.