

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

Receiving School: Stepping Stone School

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: October 20-21, 2003

Monitoring Team: Jennifer DeSaye, Janet Wright, Ann Marie Bruder

Background Information:

During the 2002– 2003 school year, the Stepping Stone School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Stepping Stone 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 Stepping Stone 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 Stepping Stone 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 Stepping Stone School's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The Stepping Stone School is commended for its development of creative and traditional programs in order to encourage the growth of its students. The traditional programs include recent participation in Boy Scouts, in that a troupe has been started at the school. The school has also been participating for the past six years in the Mylestone Equine Rescue Program. Six to eight students at a time representing all different grade levels spend an afternoon cleaning stalls, petting and grooming the horses and whatever else their abilities and time permits. Last year the students work was featured on the NJN Public Television program "Homeless Tails with Sandy Levine".

The Stepping Stone School, in conjunction with Rutgers Co-Operative Extension of Warren County Food Stamp Nutrition Program has become part of the National Nutrition

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Program Grant to assist students in learning better nutritional habits and to facilitate the skills of professional staff members in the delivery of lessons which will enhance students' awareness of better health habits. In support of the Nutrition Program, the school started a Food Preparation and Garden Program which encourages students to take an active role in the practical preparation of a variety of foods. The program includes the planting of a garden and using food sources from it in the preparation of nutritious snacks and light meals.

An event called "Awards Night", which has been occurring for 25 years, honors students at the end of each school year. The program has grown to be hosted at a local catering hall and last year close to 200 friends and relatives of students attended the banquet. Each child is recognized for accomplishing something at the ceremony and receives an engraved plaque. For many students, this is the first time that they have been honored with an award. Awards Night also serves as the graduation ceremony for both Eighth and Twelfth graders.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the Stepping Stone School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT) services as per IEP, provision of physical therapy (PT) services as per IEP, provision of speech language services as per IEP, and provision of counseling services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the areas regarding provision of physical education, maintenance of hearing aids, and program open to observation by LEA and DOE. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address maintenance of hearing aids and program observation. 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. **The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address physical education because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding certified/licensed staff, appropriate supervision of

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physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, criminal history verification, and having an approved professional development plan.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the area regarding job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office. **The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

Section IV: Facility Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding programs provided in approved facilities and certificates of occupancy and inspections.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the area regarding fire drills. 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.

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meetings conducted at least annually, IEP meetings conducted with required Stepping Stone School participants, IEP meetings conducted with students age 14 and over, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, administration of statewide tests, and statewide testing for provision of support and assistance.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the areas of communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, implementation of IEP components relating to the provision of physical therapy, and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address implementation of IEP components. 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 this area. **The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address communication with sending districts because it lacks adequate procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address progress**

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reports/report cards because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of a student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, and procedures for termination of student.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the areas concerning notification to sending districts regarding suspensions. **The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone 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, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, teachers trained in the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), collaboration for home instruction, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified concerns in the areas regarding curriculum materials aligned with CCCSs, dispensing medication, and nursing and medical services. 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 the area regarding medical services.

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 Stepping Stone School on October 20-21, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Stepping Stone School's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the Stepping Stone 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 with some revision, will be 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, many 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 and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the Stepping Stone School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the Stepping Stone School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT) services as per IEP, provision of physical therapy (PT) services as per IEP, provision of speech language services as per IEP, provision of counseling services as per IEP, certified/licensed staff, appropriate supervision of physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, criminal history verification, having an approved professional development plan, programs provided in approved facilities, certificates of occupancy and inspections, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required Stepping Stone School participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and over, signatures of participants present on IEPs, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing relating to administration, statewide testing for support and assistance, standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, procedures for termination of student, 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, teachers trained in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stone School identified areas of need regarding provision of physical education, maintenance of hearing aids, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at

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county office, fire drills, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, implementation of IEP components relating to physical therapy service, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, curriculum materials aligned with CCCSs, dispensing medication, and nursing and medical services.

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

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