

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School:	Somerset Hills School
County:	Somerset
Monitoring Dates:	November 7 and 9, 2005
Monitoring Team:	Paul Bilik, Denise Wilkens, Heather Mills-Pevonis, Elaine Lerner

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Somerset Hills School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Somerset Hills 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 Somerset Hills 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 Somerset Hills School documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in Individualized Education Programs (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 Somerset Hills School's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents, and related service personnel.

Noncompliant items reflected in this report may result in nonallowable costs in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23-4.1 through 4.16.

School Strengths:

The Somerset Hills School is commended for a curricular design that teaches to the strengths of each student using supplemental programs that address academic deficits and various learning disabilities. Many of the classes are team taught by two certified teachers which provides support to all learners, regardless of level. A climate of mutual respect among staff transcends to students and is further reinforced through the infusion of character education in the curriculum. The school invites speakers including the local

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police department to educate the students on various topics to support positive behavior and community awareness.

The Somerset Hills School provides frequent team meetings to support the therapeutic and academic goals outlined in each student's treatment plan. Students are encouraged to explore athletic and intellectual pursuits through a variety of interscholastic sports and after school clubs which also provide opportunities for social and physical skill building.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the Somerset Hills 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 Somerset Hills School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, provision of physical education, maintenance of hearing aids, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by local education agencies (LEAs) and NJDOE and provision of occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills School identified concerns in the areas regarding the provision of speech services as per the IEP. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area 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 Program/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meetings conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP meetings conducted with students, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, observation of proposed placement and statewide testing.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills School identified concerns in the areas regarding IEP meetings conducted at least annually, current IEPs at intake, communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, informing teachers/providers of IEP responsibilities, no delay in implementation of IEPs and the accuracy of progress reports. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of progress reports. 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 school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of IEPs conducted at least annually and current**

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IEPs at intake. The school is providing an educational program to students who are lacking IEPs due to emergency placements by other state agencies. Therefore, the plan must include procedures for communicating with state agencies responsible for their placements to obtain current IEPs. The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas regarding communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities and no delay in implementation of IEPs because it lacks consistent procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan must be revised to include these components.

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

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting and procedures for termination of student placement.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills School identified concerns in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures and procedures for the use of the time out room, restraints and aversives. 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 VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination of placement, access to records limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills School identified concerns in the area regarding notification of student placement. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area 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 this area.

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 Somerset Hills School on November 7 and 9, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Somerset Hills School's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the Somerset Hills School's improvement plan.

The receiving school is commended for the 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, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the Somerset Hills School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the Somerset Hills School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, provision of physical education, maintenance of hearing aids, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and NJDOE, provision of occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling services as per IEP, IEP meetings conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP meetings conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, procedures for termination of student placement, conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills School identified areas of need regarding the provision of speech services, IEP meetings conducted at least annually, obtaining a current IEP prior to intake, communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, no delay in implementation of IEPs, progress reports, standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out room, restraints and aversives and notification of student placement.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Somerset Hills 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.