

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

District: Egg Harbor Township School District **County:** Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: March 18, 19 and 20, 2002

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Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Egg Harbor Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Egg Harbor Township School District 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 protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and,
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

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 Egg Harbor Township School District developed an improvement plan to address their identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress made in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate School, on March 6, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. The monitoring team conducted on-site observations of the district's special education programs. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals and vice-principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and speech therapists. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District Strengths:

In 2001, the **C. J. Davenport Elementary School** received a Best Practice award from the New Jersey Department of Education for the multi-age program, “Doorway to Unlimited Thinking and Learning.” Instead of the traditional grade-level age designations and grade-based curriculum, the multi-age curriculum and program meets the total needs and levels of the students. The classes consist of students with an age span of two or three years who have various educational needs. Brain-based learning, learning centers, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, lifelong skills and guidelines and flex grouping are the center of the multi-age program.

The **H. Russell Swift School** was recognized as a Star School by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2000 for their cooperative learning approach to education. The focus is on individual differences in learning and enhancing learning through a positive atmosphere that centers on cooperation, community and mutual respect. The entire school staff completed a weeklong course in cooperative learning presented by Lynda Baloche, Chair of Elementary Education at West Chester University. The school uses “looping” teachers to instruct the same group of students for two years. Looping maximizes the academic and social potential of students because the teachers know the students’ needs, interests, and abilities at the start of the school year. There is also a facilitating teacher who models lessons in the classrooms, co-teaches in the class and/or co-plans with classroom teachers to promote the use of cooperative learning among all teachers at the school.

The district currently operates the **Eagle Academy Alternative Program**, an alternative school program for students who have not met with success in a traditional classroom setting. Instructional strategies focus on accommodating individual learning styles and providing students with frequent feedback on work and behavior performance. Hands-on work experiences provide concrete methods for developing independence and workplace readiness skills. Students have the opportunity to gain work experience through community job placement activities as well as classroom instruction related to careers. The program operates a number of community service-oriented projects, such as job shadowing, intergenerational activities (e.g., Project Poinsettia), and career-oriented field trips.

The Egg Harbor Township School District is commended for its commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities and for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of special education policies and procedures and dissemination of public information.

Professional development was identified during the on-site visit as an area of need.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of Need:

Professional Development – During the on-site visit, information obtained from staff interviews determined that general education teachers are in need of additional training in areas relating to instructional strategies and adaptations for students with disabilities, as well as transition. Special education teachers identified the need for training in the core curriculum content standards and transition. Staff indicated that although they had participated in recent in-service trainings in multiple intelligence theory/practice, brain-based research, cooperative learning, and reading workshops, they do not have input in identifying needed training topics.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff development needs identified during the on-site monitoring process are provided to general and special education staff. The plan must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure training is provided.**

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students, oversight of IEP implementation, changes in students' programs or services without conducting IEP meetings, functioning hearing aides, provision of program/services as required in the IEP and facilities. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses all but one area of need. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address transfer students because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component. Facilities issues have been provided to the county office of education.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent for initial evaluation and initial IEP and provision of interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, consent for reevaluation and release of records, native language, timelines for response to parental requests, notice of a meeting, components of written notice, provision of code documents, timelines for written notice, and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals from parents/staff and summer referrals

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Child Find activities, referral process (interventions in general education and effectiveness of the interventions), health summary, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings (participants and timelines), and identification of potentially disabled students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address all but one area of need. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address identification meetings (participants and timelines) for preschool age children because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. Additionally, the district has participated in technical assistance sessions regarding the issue of overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Staff from the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Special Education Programs will determine the appropriateness of that plan and advise the district of any needed revisions.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of overrepresentation of minority students evaluated for special education services, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, assessments not individualized, and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS). The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services (ESLS), documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, and evaluation reports for students eligible for speech/language services (ESLS).

Areas of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that evaluation reports for students eligible for speech/language services do not include all of the required components of a functional

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

assessment. These assessments lacked a review of the student's educational history, a review of interventions, and documentation of informal measures used by the evaluator.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure functional assessments include the required components identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The improvement plan must include training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these procedures.**

Documentation of Acceptance/Rejection of Reports – During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with the child study teams and administration, as well as record review, that although the child study team has an appropriate procedure to accept/reject reports and assessments that are provided for consideration by outside specialists, agencies, or other districts, there is no documentation to indicate implementation of the procedures.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a mechanism to ensure team members document their acceptance or rejection of outside reports. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedure.**

Dating Evaluation Reports – During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review that child study team members and speech and language specialists are not consistently dating evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child study team members and speech and language specialists are consistently dating evaluation reports. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, and conducting reevaluations by June 30th of a student's last year in a program for preschool students with disabilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the three-year timeline, notices, and parental consent. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria (except for specific learning disability), and documentation of eligibility (when determined eligible).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding criteria for specific learning disability, and provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of eligibility when it is determined that the student is not eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of Need:

Documentation of Eligibility – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that the district is not providing documentation of eligibility to parents when a student is not eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are provided with documentation of eligibility when a student is not eligible for special education and related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation dates and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP components, goals and objectives, age of majority, teacher knowledge/access to IEP documents, 90-day timelines, and provision of the IEP to parents prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP meeting participants and components of speech IEPs.

Areas of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, interviews with school personnel and parents and reviews of IEPs indicated that general education teachers are not consistently in attendance at meetings for high school students, including those placed at Eagle Academy, preschool students, and students in self-contained programs.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that general education teachers are in attendance at IEP meetings for students who are participating or may be participating in general education. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Components of Speech IEP documents – During the on-site visit, a review of speech IEP documents indicated that the following components are not addressed: strengths of the student, most recent evaluation data, modifications and accommodations for statewide assessment, and concerns of the parent.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech IEPs contain all the required components. It is recommended the district adopt the model IEP document developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making process, general education access, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of placement options. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of placement in preschool programs by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding preschool transition planning conferences. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student and agency invitations and student attendance at IEP meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding statement of the transition service needs of the student, provision and monitoring of transition

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

services by outside agencies, agency participation at IEP meetings, individualized statement of needed transition services, and career interests/preferences. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study.

Areas of Need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site visit, IEP review determined that courses of study were not consistently included in the IEP documents. Specific courses of study were identified in some IEPs while others contained boiler-plate language, with no specific courses identified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure specific courses of study are documented under transition services in student IEPs commencing at age fourteen. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, and behavioral intervention plans.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, and the provision of interim alternative educational settings (IAES). The district has developed an improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, provision of approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, and provision of alternative assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation in the Special Review Assessment (SRA). The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of high school diploma.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation in graduation for students placed in out-of-district programs. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding graduation requirements in IEP documents and the provision of written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Graduation Requirements – During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interview that IEP documents do not include graduation requirements.

- **The district will revise their improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs include graduation requirements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice – During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although the district has a form for written notice of graduation, it is not being provided to parents and adult-students.

- **The district will revise their improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of notice of graduation to parents and adult students. The plan needs to include a mechanism to document that provision as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age-range, group size for speech, provision of supplemental instruction, description of special education classes, related services schedules, and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of sufficient staff to ensure the provision of required programs and services, child study team members having apportioned time for case management responsibilities, consultation time for resource teachers, class-size, and entry of student into the local district program from a state facility. The district developed an improvement plan that

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

does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to these components.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures and parent/adult-student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of access to student records, documentation of location of other records, and maintenance and destruction of pupil records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address documentation of access to student records, and maintenance and destruction of pupil records. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address documentation of location of other records because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of this procedure. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Egg Harbor Township School District on March 18, 19 and 20, 2002. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. As a result of this exceptionally comprehensive review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, many of the concerns raised by the parents had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Parents expressed positive comments regarding the smooth transition from early intervention programs to preschool special education programs, the dedication of the child study team, and the use of special education reading specialists.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of public information, areas of length of day/year, certifications, consent for initial evaluation and initial IEP, provision of interpreters at meetings, direct referrals from parents/staff, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, conducting reevaluations by June 30th of a student's last year in a program for preschool students with disabilities, eligibility meetings/participants, criteria (except for specific learning disability), documentation of eligibility (when determined eligible), annual review timelines, implementation dates, placement in preschool programs by age three, student/agency invitation to transition IEP meeting, student attendance at IEP meetings, conducting manifestation determination meetings, provision of functional behavioral assessments, provision of behavioral intervention plans, participation in statewide assessment, provision of approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, provision of alternative assessments, provision of high school diploma, age-range, group size for speech, provision of supplemental instruction, description of special education classes, related services schedules, home instruction/approvals, student record procedures, and parent/adult-student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students, oversight of IEP implementation, changes in students' programs or services without conducting Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, functioning hearing aides, provision of program/services as required in the IEP, instructional facilities, surrogate parents, consent for reevaluation and release of records, native language, timelines for response to parental requests, notice of a meeting, components of written notice, provision of code documents, timelines for written notice, independent evaluations, Child Find activities, referral process (interventions in general education and effectiveness of the interventions), health summary, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings (participants and timelines), identification of potentially disabled students, over-representation of minority students evaluated for special education, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, assessments not individualized, provision of written reports for students eligible for

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

special education and related services, three-year timeline for reevaluation, criteria for specific learning disability, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP components, goals and objectives, age of majority, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, 90-day timelines, provision of the IEP to parents prior to implementation, individualized decision-making process, general education access, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of placement options, preschool transition planning conferences, agency involvement in transition IEP, statement of the transition service needs, statement of needed transition services, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, and the provision of interim alternative educational settings, participation in the Special Review Assessment for the High School Proficiency Test, participation in graduation for students placed in out of district programs, provision of sufficient staff to ensure the provision of required programs and services, child study team members having apportioned time for case management responsibilities, consultation time for resource teachers, class size, and entry of student into the local district program from a state facility, documentation of access to student records, documentation of location of other records, and maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding professional development, functional assessments, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, written reports, documentation of eligibility, EP meeting participants, components of speech IEP documents, graduation requirements in IEP documents, and provision of written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Egg Harbor Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions.