

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

District: Folsom School District **County:** Atlantic
Monitoring Dates: April 15 and 18, 2005
Monitoring Team: Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Folsom School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Folsom School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Folsom School District developed an improvement plan to address 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 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 Folsom Elementary School on April 12, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, administrative principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

PART ONE DATA SUMMARY:

A review of the data submitted by the Folsom School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the district's classification rate has been at or near the state average for the past three years. For the 2004 school year, the district's classification rate was 13.87 %, below the state average of 14.61%.

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With regard to placement, for the 2004 school year, 42.5% of school age students received instruction in the general education classroom more than 80% of the school day as compared to the state average of 41.9%.

District Strengths:

The Folsom School District is commended for the variety of supports provided to both general education and special education students. Through a coordinated effort between the Folsom School, Big Brothers of Atlantic County and Saint Augustine's Prep, forty students in kindergarten through grade six benefit from mentoring on an ongoing basis throughout the school year. A summer reading and math maintenance program is also available for students and offers intensive support and assistance. Students at risk in grades four through eight may volunteer to participate in a remedial academic support program that is offered for a twelve week period. Students identified in need of stress management may participate in a six week stress management course sponsored by Atlantic Behavioral Health.

General education and special education students participate in variety of special activities that promote community awareness and creativity. The Invention Convention provides students opportunity to develop a hypothesis and then prove it correct. The "Super Bowl Party" resulted in over three hundred cans of soup being donated to the community. Numerous school based programs exist to reward and recognize student accomplishments in academic and character development.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions and **Statewide Assessment** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day and year, related services and transfer students.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities and extended school year.

Areas of Need:

Facilities - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through the interview process and classroom visitation that the district conducts 2 and on occasion 3 classes in the same classroom at the same time. Furthermore, the district did not apply to the county department of education office for approval for dual use of a classroom.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure approval from the county office for dual use is obtained when two classes are conducted in the same classroom at the same time. The plan will also include activities to ensure that no more than two classes**

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are conducted in the same room at the same time. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive their educational program in an environment that will allow them to benefit from their educational program with minimal distraction. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the extended school year program is not consistently considered for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure extended school year is considered for every classified student and that all required considerations are documented in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will result in the consideration of regression and recoupment issues for all students as well as assist the team in determining the need for an extended school year program. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, meetings, written notice, independent evaluations and notice in native language.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings and consent.

Area of Need:

Notice of Meeting - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that notice of meeting for students eligible for speech and language services does not consistently inform the parents of their right to invite others with expertise to the meeting. Furthermore notice of meeting does not inform the parent that for students 14 years of age and older, the purpose of the meeting will include the development of a transition service plan and that the student will be invited to the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written notice contains all required components. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the parent is informed in writing of the purpose of the meeting and is provided time to prepare for the meeting. The activities will also ensure the parent is informed of the right to invite others with expertise to the meeting. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice of meeting forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs available at www.state.nj.us/education. The plan must include in-service and an**

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administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Consent - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that consent to implement the initial IEP for students eligible for speech and language services is not consistently documented. As a result, it was not possible to verify this area.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district receives parental consent prior to implementing the initial IEP for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that services do not begin without agreement from the parent. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, direct parent and staff referrals and child find activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, identification meeting participants, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the areas of pre-referral interventions and identification meeting participants. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of vision and hearing screening and health summary because it lacks sufficient activities including administrative oversight to bring about corrective action. Projected timelines must also be revised to reflect expedited implementation. The plan must be revised to include these elements.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding summer referrals and identification meeting timelines,

Areas of Need:

Summer Referrals and Identification Meeting Timelines - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that identification meetings for referrals received during the summer are not conducted according to required timelines. This is due to the fact that the child study team and speech-language specialist are not available throughout the summer.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure identification meetings with all required participants are conducted within twenty days of receipt of the referral throughout the year including the summer months. Implementation of these activities will ensure identification meetings are conducted within twenty days and there is no delay in determining need for an evaluation, determining eligibility and implementation of the initial IEP. The plan must include**

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an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and written reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessment.

Area of Need:

Functional Assessment - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that a parent interview and informal measures are not consistently included in the written report prepared by the speech-language specialist. Other components of a functional assessment conducted for speech and language services are conducted but not consistently included in the evaluation report. Furthermore, a structured observation in other than a testing session is not consistently included in evaluation reports prepared by the child study team for students eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written reports contain all components of a functional assessment. Implementation of these activities will ensure reports contain sufficient information upon which an eligibility determination can be made. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of planning meetings, participants and reevaluations conducted by age 5 and in the students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of 3-year timelines. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria and statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of evaluation reports to the parent at least ten days prior to the meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it does address all the barriers identified in the self-assessment and the projected timeline has not been met. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signature of agreement/disagreement.

Area of Need:

Signature of Agreement/Disagreement - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through the record review process determined that the IEP team members do not consistently document their agreement or disagreement and rational for disagreement with the eligibility determination.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of eligibility includes a certification of agreement/disagreement. Implementation of these activities will ensure that district personnel have an opportunity to state in writing whether they agree or disagree with the eligibility determination and to provide a rational for their disagreement. As a result, parents will be fully informed of differing opinions regarding the eligibility determination. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, Present Level of Educational Performance, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and ninety-day timelines

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, and the provision of the IEP to parents prior to implementation. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in these areas.

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

Area of Need:

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that students age fourteen are not consistently invited to attend annual review meetings at which transition service needs are discussed and plans developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that beginning at age fourteen, and for those students who will turn age 14 during the implementation dates of the IEP, the student is invited to the meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student is provided opportunity to provide input regarding interests and preferences and vision for the future. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that all required participants do not consistently attend annual review meetings conducted for students classified as preschool disabled.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required participants are in attendance at annual review meetings conducted for students classified as preschool disabled. Implementation of these activities will ensure all required participants have the opportunity to participate in decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Speech and Language IEP Components – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that the speech and language IEP does not include all required components.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the speech and language IEP contains all required components. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required statements and considerations are discussed and documented in the IEP. The district is encouraged to refer to the model IEP form for speech-language services available from the New Jersey Department of Education available at www.state.nj.us/education. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Multiple IEPs - Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that for students eligible for special education and related services and receiving speech therapy as a related service, a special education IEP and a speech and language IEP including goals and objectives are developed. As a result, the student has two IEPs.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district develops only one IEP for students eligible for special education and related services. Activities must ensure the IEP includes speech and language goals and objectives and other information relevant to the provision of speech services as a related service. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all service providers are using the IEP developed by the appropriate IEP team. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of least restrictive environment, considerations and documentation and supplemental aides and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool and school age general education access, continuum and individual decision making. The district identified the preschool barrier as a lack of in-district preschool inclusion programs. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has begun to implement activities to bring about corrective action in the area of preschool general education access, continuum and individual-decision making. Students classified as preschool disabled are now included in the general education preschool program.

Area of Need:

Individual Decision-Making and General Education Access - In the improvement plan, the district identified the barrier to expanding program options for school age students as a lack of inclusive general education options. Although the district has increased the number of in-class support options, the chief school administrator/principal and staff indicated during interviews conducted as part of the on-site visit that additional opportunities for in-class support are needed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students have access to general education programs through in-class support and inclusion options. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive instruction in programs based on their individual needs and that program decisions are made on an individual basis determined by the needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedure.**

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in the preschool planning conference and implementing programs by age 3. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding age 14 transition service needs.

Area of Need:

Transition Service Needs - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that student interests and preferences, courses of study and the statement of technical consultation are not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required components of transition service needs are documented in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student is afforded the opportunity to achieve his or her desired post secondary outcomes and will ensure knowledge on the part of the agency regarding the services the agency will be required to provide. If the agency should fail to provide those services, the district will have the opportunity to develop an alternative plan regarding the needed transition services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedural safeguards, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of notification of removal to the case manager case manager. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Folsom School District serves students through grade 8. Graduation requirements are not applicable.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class size, group size for speech therapy, home instruction, and common planning time.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the availability of child study team staff and case managers for speech and language services during the summer. This area of need was addressed in the Location, Referral and Identification section of the monitoring report.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent access to records, documentation of location of other records in cumulative files maintained for students eligible for special education and related services and maintenance and destruction of student records.

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 Folsom School District on April 15 and 18, 2005. 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. The district is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address many of 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. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated a district classification rate that has been at or near the state average over a three year period. During the self-assessment process, the district identified need to develop an inclusive preschool program and has begun to implement activities in this area. The percentage of special education students who receive instruction in the general education classes 80% of the school day or more is slightly above the state average.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents indicated that students have current and individualized IEPs that reflect the needs of their children. Parents were of the opinion that the IEPs were individualized and challenged the students. Parents stated that although school age students with disabilities have access to all general education programs, students would benefit from additional support in general education classes. Case managers, teachers and administration are responsive to the needs of the students and parents. However, parents indicated that the child study team is not always available during the summer months if a concern develops. Parents indicated that progress reporting is not sufficient to inform the parents of their child's progress. Parental participation is encouraged and supported by the district. Parents stated they would benefit from training in the areas of transition planning, IDEA and understanding the IEP as a total document and the relationships among components.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included **General Provisions and Statewide Assessment**.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, meetings, written notice, independent evaluations, notice in native language, referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, child find activities, multi disciplinary-assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations conducted by age five, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, Present Level of Educational Performance, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge, ninety-day timelines, documentation of least restrictive environment,

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supplemental aides and services, disciplinary procedural safeguards, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment/behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, class size, group size for speech, age range, home instruction, common planning time, parent access to records, documentation of other locations for students eligible for special education and related services and maintenance and destruction of records.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are pre-referral interventions, identification meeting participants, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, annual review meeting participants, provision of IEP prior to implementation, preschool general education access, continuum and individual decision-making, preschool transition planning conference, implementing programs by age three and notification of removal to the case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding vision and hearing screenings, health summary, provision of evaluation reports to parents, school age general education access, continuum and individual decision-making.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, extended school year, notice of meetings, consent, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines, functional assessment, signature of agreement or disagreement, IEP implementation dates, components of the speech and language IEP, annual review meeting participants, school age general education access, continuum and individual decision-making, and age 14 transition service needs.

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