

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: May 19 – 21, 2003

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High 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 Greater Egg Harbor Regional High 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 Oakcrest High School on May 8, 2003. 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, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members. Parents were interviewed by telephone.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the operation of the school stores at Oakcrest High School and Absegami High School, and the production of the school newspaper at Duberson Alternative School. All of these programs and activities are staffed by students with disabilities.

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The district has been a recipient of an Inclusion Institute grant. As part of the grant the district presents an annual inclusion institute for staff and administration during the summer. Additionally, the district has established several support study skills classes at Oakcrest High School for students with disabilities who are in college prep courses.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Statewide Assessment, and Graduation 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended year services, adaptive PE, length of school day/year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services (provision of speech and counseling services, and lack of goals/objectives for physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling), transfer procedures, and oversight of IEP implementation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent (initial evaluation, initial implementation of IEP, and release of records), written notice, notice timelines, and meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parental consent for reevaluation, notice of a transition meeting, participants at all meetings (general education teachers), native language, and independent evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents and special education teachers at meetings.

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the district does not have a method for selecting and training surrogate parents in the event one is needed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district appropriately selects and trains surrogate parents in the event one is needed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Participants at Meetings - Although the district identified concerns with the participation of general education teachers at meetings (identification, eligibility, IEP, and reevaluation planning meetings), during the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that special education teachers do not consistently attend IEP meetings and reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that special education teachers attend IEP meetings and reevaluation planning meetings, if appropriate. They must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, and identification meetings (summer timelines and participants). **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks**

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an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 multi-disciplinary assessments, use of standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of medical evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the area of components of functional assessments. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, conducting a reevaluation when a change in eligibility is considered, and reevaluation conducted without undue delay.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and eligibility criteria.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations and rationale for disagreement, and provision of evaluation reports prior to the eligibility meeting.

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Areas of Need:

Provision of Evaluation Reports Prior to Eligibility Meeting - During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff and parents indicated that the district does not consistently provide the parents (or adult student) with copies of the written evaluation reports and documentation that will be used for determination of eligibility at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that copies of the evaluation reports will be provided to the parents (or adult student) at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement of Determination of Eligibility – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff and a review of student records indicated that the IEP team does not certify in writing whether they agree or disagree with the determinations of eligibility or identify a rationale as to why they disagree.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that members of the IEP team document their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 IEP components, procedures for revising IEPs, age of majority, and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP goals and objectives, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, and placement observation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district further identified concerns in the area of participation of vocational personnel at IEP meetings for shared time county vocational school/vocational technical school students with disabilities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the frequency and duration of special education and related services.

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Area of Need:

Frequency and Duration of Special Education and Related Services – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that IEPs identify frequency as a minimum number of sessions and the duration as “current school year.”

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs clearly and accurately identify the specific frequency and duration of the special education program and related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invitations, agency involvement, IEP documentation of transition services needs, needed transition services, and participation of students with disabilities in appropriate post-school activities. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures to identify and develop appropriate transition programs/opportunities, in-service for staff, students, and parents on appropriate post-school activities (post secondary education, employment, and community experiences), a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of discipline procedures, notification of removals to case managers, development of behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determinations, and procedures for placement in interim alternative education settings. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size and group size for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age range, common planning time, and employing sufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of home instruction. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the use of the speech-language specialist as the case manager for students classified as eligible for special education and related services.

Area of Need:

Speech-Language Specialists as Case Managers – During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the speech-language specialist was case manager for students who were classified as eligible for special education and related services and who did not have a suspected language disorder.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the speech-language specialist only serves in the role of case manager for those students referred for a suspected voice, articulation or fluency disorder, and for some students with a suspected language disorder (students who are classified as eligible for special education and related services/communication impaired). The speech-language specialist can not act as case manager for students who are not in these categories. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parents/adult student access to records, access sheets, and documentation of locations of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for maintenance and destruction of records. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District on May 19-21, 2003. 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 many areas 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, parents expressed their concerns with the availability of the child study team members, that students with disabilities are not challenged academically, that students with disabilities do not have courses available that coordinate with their transition plans, and that teachers are not familiar with the modifications identified in IEPs.

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 IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, consent for initial evaluation, initial implementation of IEP and release of records), written notice, multi-disciplinary assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, eligibility criteria, IEP revisions, age of majority, teachers access to IEPs, least restrictive environment, individualized decision-making, provision of supplemental aids and services, access to regular education, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of services, statewide assessments, and graduation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, provision of related services, transfer procedures, notice of transition meetings, participants at meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral procedures, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision/hearing screenings, health summary, functional assessments, consent for reevaluations, timelines for annual reviews, initial evaluations, and reevaluations, IEP oversight, placement observation, participation of vocational personnel at IEP meetings, transition to post-school, discipline, age range, common planning time, sufficient staff, home instruction, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding surrogate parents, special education teachers at IEP and reevaluation meetings, provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to eligibility meeting, certification of agreement/disagreement of determination of eligibility, documentation of frequency/duration of special education program and related services in IEP, and use of speech-language specialists as case managers for students classified as eligible for special education and related services.

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