

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Mainland Regional High School District

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: February 3 – 5, 2004

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Mainland 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 Mainland 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 Mainland 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 Mainland Regional High School on January 13, 2004. 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 administrator, building principal and vice-principals, guidance personnel, general education and special education teachers, related services providers, parents, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Mainland Regional High School District is commended for its Self-Advocacy Skills Program. Students from this class presented on self-advocacy at the DARE to DREAM Conference. Their presentation was so successful that the New Jersey Center for Protection and Advocacy requested their curriculum to share with other school districts

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throughout the state. The students also presented their personal histories at a special education orientation luncheon for incoming eighth graders with disabilities. The new eighth grade students reported feeling more at ease with the transition process after this luncheon/workshop.

The district is also commended for the addition of new courses to meet the needs of the student population. Some of the recent course additions were Social Skills, Personal Wellness, Transition I & II, Computer Technology II, and Academic Maintenance.

Part One Data Summary:

The Mainland Regional High School District is commended for maintaining positive trends in the placement of classified students in general education settings over the last several years. Review of data indicates that in 2003 62.5 % of classified students were in general education programs for more than 80% of the school day. This is well above the state's average of 41.6%. The district has established a second emotionally disturbed class at the high school enabling more students to remain in their home school instead of being placed in separate settings. With the addition of these classes, the district has reduced the number of students placed in separate public schools and private day schools from a high of 16 students in 2001 to the current low of 7 students.

Data indicate that 44 students with disabilities participated in the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) in March 2002, of which 39.5% scored proficient or advanced proficient. The district has identified a need in its improvement plan to increase the number of students with disabilities who pass the HSPA, by providing more appropriate approved accommodations/modifications.

Data submitted by the district also indicated that of all the students with disabilities who graduated in June 2003, 44% went on to post secondary education. However, only 8% of the students with disabilities who graduated secured full-time employment. The district has identified a need in its improvement plan to hire a transition coordinator to develop and implement school to work opportunities. Additionally, the district indicated a drop out rate of 5.1%. The district has identified a need in its improvement plan to increase mental and social services both in the school and in the community to help prevent students from dropping out of high school.

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 in-services training for professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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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/year, facilities, and staff certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of related services (counseling services, adaptive physical education, and implementation date of services), and procedures for transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year (ESY) – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that the district does not consistently consider extended school year services for every student determined eligible for special education and related services or eligible of speech-language services. In addition, for those students who are found in need of extended school year programming, IEPs lack a description of the ESY program, type, duration and frequency of services, and goals/objectives.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that extended school is considered for every student with disabilities. If these services are warranted, the IEP must contain a description of the ESY program, including type, frequency, and duration of services as well as goals and objectives. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive extended school year services that support the educational program and address the issues related to regression/recoupment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/reevaluation/release of student records, content of notice of a meeting, provision of notice of a meeting in English, conducting required meetings, provision of interpreters for meetings, content of written notice, and conducting independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for locating and training surrogate parents, provision of written notice, provision of notices in native language, and documentation of attempts to secure parent participation at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, identification meetings timelines, and identification meetings participants during the school year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, audiometric/hearing screenings, and summer identification meetings participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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, development of written reports, written reports are signed and dated, and provision of bilingual evaluations when required.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of standardized assessments to meet the diverse needs of specific populations such as pervasive developmental disorders and non-verbal cognitively impaired. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

The district further identified a concern regarding the documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of outside reports from approved clinics, agencies, or professionals in private practice. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Components of Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that evaluation reports do not consistently include a structured observation of the student in other than a testing session, and an interview with the teacher(s) referring the student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that functional assessments contain all required components identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)2. Implementation of these activities will ensure**

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eligibility determinations are based on all required data obtained through the assessment process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted, reevaluation planning meetings, and conducting reevaluations prior to declassification.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation of consent to reevaluate (undue delay).

Area(s) of Need:

Implementation of Consent to Reevaluate (Undue Delay) - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that for those students where it is determined that additional assessments are needed to determine continued eligibility, the district obtains consent to reevaluate but does not conduct the assessments until many months later, in some cases up to 10 months later. There is a significant gap between the decision to reevaluate and the actual determination of continued eligibility. As such, the data reviewed are no longer current and the decisions made at the time of the annual review may no longer be valid.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that upon receipt of consent to reevaluate, the district will, without delay, initiate the appropriate assessments and conduct an eligibility meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure that eligibility decisions are based on current existing data and, if appropriate, new assessment information. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, and signatures of agreement or disagreement with rationale.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, considerations in IEPs, goals/objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, observation of proposed placement, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of regular education teacher participation at meetings, vocational personnel for shared time students participation at meetings, required statements in IEPs (present levels of performance), provision of IEP to parent/adult student prior to implementation, and teacher knowledge of/access to IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision making, documentation of the Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, access to regular education programs, and continuum of program options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation of students with disabilities in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool is not applicable for this regional high school district.

Section X: Transition to Post - School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition IEP considerations/documentation, agency involvement, student/agency invitations, age 14 transition service needs, student interests and preferences, courses of study, annual goals relate to student's desired outcomes, established partnerships/relationships with community resources, and statement of needed transition services for students age 16.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of need for a transition coordinator to develop community based work programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 areas of procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations meetings, interim alternative educational settings, and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification of suspensions to the case managers, documentation of functional behavioral assessments, and additional in-service for staff on suspension policies.

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 in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, provision of alternative proficiency assessment when required, process for exemption from passing, and the Special Review Assessment process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of approved accommodations and modifications (provision of additional appropriate accommodations and modification, not just extended time and separate group settings). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 areas of provision of diploma, participation in graduation, and written notice of graduation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of IEP requirements for graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consultation time for resource teachers and general education teachers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

The district also identified concerns in the area of case load and case management responsibility for the CST. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure that case managers will have an apportioned amount of time for case management responsibilities.** The inclusion of this component will ensure case managers have the time to monitor whether a student receives the instructional accommodations, modifications, and services required by the IEP.

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 access, access sheets, and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of other location of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement the improvement plan 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 Mainland Regional High School District on February 3-5, 2004. 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all 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.

A review of data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Furthermore, the district has maintained a placement rate for classified students in the general education setting that has been consistently above the state average. To decrease the drop out rate and to secure full time employment for students with disabilities upon graduation, the district plans to create school to work opportunities.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, eight parents and many district personnel attended. Parents reported their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Parents felt that the district does an "excellent job" with transition. Parents liked that students are invited to meetings and are encouraged to participate in the development of their own transition plans. Additionally, parents and staff both were concerned that case managers have very high caseloads and are not able to provide each student with the appropriate level of service. This issue had been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, facilities, staff certification, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/reevaluation/release of student records, content of notice of a meeting, provision of notice of a meeting in English, conducting required meetings, provision of interpreters for meetings, content of written notice, conducting independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals, identification meetings timelines, identification meetings participants during the school year, multi-disciplinary assessments, development of written reports, written reports are signed and dated, provision of bilingual evaluations when required, conducting reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted, reevaluation planning meetings, conducting reevaluations prior to declassification, eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement with rationale, IEP meetings, considerations in IEPs, goals/objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, observation of proposed placement, 90-day timelines, individualized decision making, documentation of the Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, access to regular education programs, continuum of program options, transition IEP considerations/documentation, agency involvement, student/agency invitations, age 14 transition service needs, student interests and preferences, courses of study, annual goals relate to student's desired outcomes, established partnerships/relationships with community resources, statement of needed transition services for students age 16, procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral

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intervention plans, manifestation determinations meetings, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, participation in statewide assessments, provision of approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, provision of alternative proficiency assessment when required, process for exemption from passing, Special Review Assessment process, provision of diploma, participation in graduation, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, access to pupil records, access sheets, and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-services training for professional and professional staff and parents, provision of related services (counseling services, adaptive physical education, implementation date of services), procedures for transfer students, procedures for locating and training surrogate parents, provision of written notice, provision of notices in native language, documentation of attempts to secure parent participation at meetings, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, audiometric/hearing screenings, summer identification meetings participants, standardized assessments, eligibility, provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to meeting, regular education teacher participation at meetings, vocational personnel for shared time students participation at meetings, required statements in IEPs (present levels of performance), provision of IEP to parent/adult student prior to implementation, teacher knowledge of/access to IEPs, participation of students with disabilities in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, need for a transition coordinator, notification of suspensions to the case managers, documentation of functional behavioral assessments, provision of accommodations and modification, IEP requirements for graduation, consultation time for resource teachers and general education teachers, case load and case management responsibility for the CST, and documentation of other location of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year services, components of functional assessments, and implementation of consent to reevaluate.

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