

The New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Pleasantville Public Schools

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: October 29,30,31 and November 1, 2001

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Background Information

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Pleasantville Public Schools conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pleasantville Public Schools with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free and 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 positive student outcome.
- 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, area that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Pleasantville Public Schools developed an improvement plan to address the identified areas.

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

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and members of the community at Pleasantville High School on October 25, 2001. 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 and 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 principals, general education and special education teachers and child study team members.

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I. General Provision

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 regarding professional development for both special education and general education teachers. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

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

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, related services (ST, OT, PT, counseling), transfer students, provision of programs and services and facilities. The facilities issue has been addressed with the county office.

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the need for extended school year is not considered on an individual basis for all classified students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year services are considered for all classified students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Related Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that counseling is not considered or discussed at IEP meetings for those students who may require that service. Instead, guidance counselors provide counseling on an “as needed” basis.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the need for counseling as a related service is considered and discussed at IEP meetings. In the event the IEP team determines counseling is required, it must be included in the IEP. The plan must include a mechanism to determine staffing needs as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Documentation of the Provision of Related Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined the district does not maintain documentation of the provision of related services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of the provision of related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Transfer Students – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although child study teams are placing students in programs that are consistent with the current IEP when there is a disagreement regarding the appropriateness of that IEP, IEPs are not being developed to identify what that program will be.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that interim IEPs are developed when there is a disagreement regarding the placement identified in the IEP received from the previous district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Provision of Programs and Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and schedules that programs and services are not being provided in accordance with IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students receive the programs and services require by their IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notice, receipt of IEP prior to implementation and native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address written notice and receipt of IEP prior to implementation because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these procedures. The district did not submit an improvement plan for the native language issue. As such, the plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings and components of written notice.

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Areas of Need:

Notice of Meetings/Written Notices - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that notice of a meeting does not include a statement that parents can invite other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise to an IEP meeting. Further review indicated notice of a meeting to determine the eligibility of students for speech/language services includes a statement that eligibility has already been determined. Additionally, it was determined through record review and interviews that the district does not consistently provide notice of meetings. During the on-site monitoring it was also determined that written notice for students determined to be ineligible for special education and related services does not contain all required components.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that notices of meetings include a statement that parents can invite other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise to an IEP meeting. The plan must also ensure that notices of a meeting do not include statements regarding eligibility status. The plan must further ensure notice of a meeting is provided on a consistent basis. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**
- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written notice for students determined not eligible for special education and related services contains all required components.**
- **It is recommended the district adopt the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs to address both of these issues.**

IV. Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding pre-referral interventions and vision screenings at the middle school and high school and identifying students as potentially disabled when it is determined that an evaluation is warranted. The district did not submit an improvement plan for these issues. The district needs to revise the improvement plan to include procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the required changes.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities at the high school and timelines for identification meetings.

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Areas of Need:

Child Find - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that child find activities are limited to preschool aged students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child find activities include children between the ages of three and twentyone, including homeless and migrant children. The plan must include an administrative oversight component and in-service to ensure staff are aware of these child find activities and provide that information, when necessary, on a consistent basis.**

Identification Meetings - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that identification meetings are not being conducted within 20-days of receipt of a written referral from the PAC. It was further determined regular education teachers do not consistently attend these meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are conducted within 20-days of the receipt of the referral and that the required participants attend the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures.**

V. Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written reports and specific learning disabilities. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an appropriate administrative oversight component to ensure 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 written reports.

Area of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring a review of assessment reports indicated they are not dated. In addition, assessment reports do not consistently include a review of interventions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure assessment reports are dated and include all required components, including a review of interventions.**

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VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings, parental consent and turning age five.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants.

Area of Need:

Participants – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews determined that regular education teachers do not consistently attend IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers attend IEP meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding criteria for determining severe discrepancy and the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the criteria issue. The improvement plan is insufficient to address the provision of evaluation reports to parents because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during on-site monitoring regarding participants and criteria.

Areas of Need

Criteria - During on-site monitoring a record review determined that students who were determined eligible for speech and language services were classified eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the assignment of an appropriate classification category. The plan must include a training component and an administrative oversight component to ensure appropriate implementation of the procedures.**

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Participants – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although administrators frequently sign as meeting participants, they typically do not actually attend these meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that only those individuals who actually attend the IEP meeting sign as participants. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards (CCCS) and 90-day evaluation timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding meeting participants, IEP considerations and required statements, annual review timelines, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access to the IEPs, and providing IEPs to parents prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 IEP goals and objectives, implementation dates, frequency/location/duration of services, and revisions to IEPs.

Areas of Need:

IEP Goals and Objectives - During on-site monitoring a review of student records indicated that goals and objectives are not consistently developed for those subjects identified as part of the student's special education program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure goals and objectives are developed for those subjects that comprise the student's special education program.**

15-Day Notice - During on-site monitoring a review of student records indicated that when parents do not attend IEP meetings, the changes are implemented immediately without affording parents the right to consider the proposed changes for a fifteen-day period of time.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are afforded the opportunity to consider any proposed action for 15-days prior to program implementation unless the parents agree to immediate implementation.**

Frequency/Location/Duration of Services – During on-site monitoring a review of student records indicated that IEPs do not consistently identify whether speech and

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language services are to be provided in a small group or in an individual setting nor do they identify the location, duration, or subject for resource center instruction. At the middle school level, IEPs describe resource services as being provided in the regular classroom or in the learning resource center and the duration of services is identified as 50 – 100%.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs clearly identify the location, subject, and duration of resource center instruction and whether speech services will be provided in a small group setting or on an individual basis . The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

IEP Revisions - During on-site monitoring a review of student records and interviews with school personnel indicated that IEPs are not consistently revised prior to making changes in student programs. This issue was identified particularly at the high school level due to the timelines associated with block scheduling. As a result, in some cases, students may be scheduled for mainstream classes or inclusion classes, even though the IEPs and notices provided to parents identify a different or more restrictive placement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs and notices accurately identify the proposed programs recommended at the IEP meeting. In the event those recommendations change subsequent to the completion of the block scheduling process, the IEP team needs to be reconvened, the IEP needs to be revised, and parents need to receive written notice that contains the proposed changes. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and documentation, and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Oberti factors. The district developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure procedures are fully implemented. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding continuum and individualized decision-making.

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Areas of Need:

Continuum and Individualized Decision-Making – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records, interviews with staff, and classroom observations indicated that because of scheduling issues resulting from block scheduling, ICS is not available to students who may require it.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure program decisions are based on the individualized needs of students and not on the availability of programming options. The plan must include a mechanism to conduct an assessment to determine the programming needs of the district and the resulting needs for staff and other resources. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component and in-service to ensure staff are implementing an appropriate decision-making process on a consistent basis.**

X. Transition

Transition from Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled by age 3.

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

Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district-identified concerns regarding agency involvement, age 14-transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests and age 16 transition services needs. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of needs because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding student and agency invitations.

Area of Need:

Student and Agency Invitation - During the on site monitoring a review of records indicated that although the district has made efforts to ensure students are verbally invited to meetings when transition is discussed, students do not receive written invitations. Record review further indicated agencies are not invited to attend these meetings.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students and agencies are provided with a written invitation to meetings when transition services are discussed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures.**

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the entire section as an area of need. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding participation and alternate assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding approved accommodations and modifications.

Area of Need:

Approved Accommodations and Modifications – During the monitoring, interviews with regular and special education teachers indicated that although the district is documenting approved accommodations and modifications in IEPs these accommodations and modifications are not being implemented. It was further determined that these accommodations and modifications are not being implemented because the district lacks procedures to ensure teachers are aware of these accommodations and modifications.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that approved accommodations and modifications are implemented during statewide assessments. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure teachers are aware of the need to implement these accommodations and modifications. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

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XIII. Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice.

Area of Need:

Written Notice – During on-site monitoring a review of records determined that written notice of graduation is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students and parents receive written notice of graduation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding class size, team teaching and supplementary instructional services. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 provision of special education services.

Area of Need:

Special Education Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel at the middle school noted that special education teachers and classroom aides are often pulled from their classroom assignments to provide coverage for other staff members.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that special education instruction services at the middle school level are provided on a consistent basis. This plan must include an administrative oversight component.**

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XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district-identified concerns regarding documentation of locations of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding access sheets in records for students who are eligible for speech-language services.

Area of Need:

Access Sheets – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that records for students who are eligible for speech-language services did not contain access sheets.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all student records contain access sheets.**

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Summary

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pleasantville Public School District on October 29, 30, 31 and November 1, 2001. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan.

The NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Pleasantville High School on October 25, 2001. Although the district advertised and stakeholders in the community were invited, only three parents attended. These parents expressed concerns regarding related services and extended school year.

Areas identified by the district as consistently compliant during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, independent evaluations, referrals, hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, timelines, documentation of eligibility, alignment of goals and objectives with CCCS, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, preschool transition, IEP requirements for graduation, diploma and participation, age range, group size, homebound instruction, parent/adult student access to record, and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, receipt of IEP prior to implementation, written notice, native language, pre-referral interventions, vision screening, identifying students as potentially disabled, identification meetings, written reports, eligibility criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents, participants, considerations and required statements, age of majority, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge/access, Oberti factors, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs courses, preferences and interests, age 16 transition service needs, discipline, participation in statewide assessments, alternative assessments, class size and documentation of location of other records.

The on-site visit further identified areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students, oversight of IEP implementation, facilities, notice of meeting, participants, written notice, child find, timelines for identification meetings, criteria, IEP goals and objectives, implementation dates, statements of special education services, frequency/location/duration of services, revisions to IEP, continuum and individualized decision-making, student/agency invitation, approved accommodations and modifications, written notice of graduation, provision of special education services, and access sheets.

Within forty-five days (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the 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 to the improvement plan.