

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Somers Point School District

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: January 9, 10, and 11, 2002

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Jane Marano

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Somers Point School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Somers Point 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 Somers Point School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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 made in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Dawes Avenue Elementary School on December 17, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

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

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SECTION I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of public information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding policies and procedures and professional development. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of needs because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures to bring about required changes. The improvement plan must be revised to include this component.

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 area of length of school day and year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, adaptive physical education, goals and objectives for related services, changes in students' programs or services without conducting IEP meetings, provision of programs and services as specified in students' IEPs, availability of service providers (speech and counseling), certification, and transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure procedures are implemented to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of occupational therapy services and appropriate facilities for instruction. Facilities issues have been provided to the county office of education.

Area of Need:

Provision of Occupational Therapy Services-- During the on-site visit, staff interviews, IEP review, and a review of therapy schedules indicated that occupational therapy services are not being provided by the date specified in IEPs. The district contracts with an approved agency for occupational therapy services, but the agency does not initiate those services until October. IEPs indicate a September start date.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the provision of occupational therapy is provided in accordance with the start date identified in IEPs. The improvement plan**

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must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.

SECTION III. PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of special education rules (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14), due process hearing rules (N.J.A.C. 1:6A), Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE), and the short procedural safeguard statement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, notices of all meetings, written notice, meetings, and native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures to bring about required changes. In addition, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of independent evaluations. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight components to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents.

Area of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site visit it was determined through interviews that the district does not have procedures for the selection and training of surrogate parents, in the event one is needed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the selection and training of surrogate parents, in the event one is needed.**

SECTION IV. LOCATION, REFERRAL, IDENTIFICATION

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find information, direct referrals from parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meetings (participants and timelines).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process (including pre-referral, interventions, effectiveness, and documentation), documentation of referrals for students eligible for speech-language services when other

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disabilities are suspected, and vision and hearing screenings for preschoolers with disabilities. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address vision and hearing screenings because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the referral process because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the documentation of referrals from the speech therapist for students classified as eligible for speech-language services when other disabilities are suspected because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding health summaries and hearing/vision screenings for school age students with disabilities.

Area of Need:

Health Summaries and Vision/Hearing Screenings - During the on-site visit it was determined that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are not conducted prior to the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is referred, the school nurse summarizes available health and medical information on the student, conducts vision and hearing screenings, and provides this information to the child study team prior to the identification meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedure.**

SECTION V. EVALUATION

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, and the provision of bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services, written reports, and documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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SECTION VI. REEVALUATION

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of three-year timelines, especially when a reevaluation is needed during the summer months. The district had developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that the procedures are implemented to bring about the required changes.

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 area of documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding eligibility meetings, participants, criteria (for communication impaired and eligible for speech-languages services), and the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

SECTION VIII. INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of implementation dates and alignment of goals/objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding participants at IEP meetings, 90-day timeline for implementation, provision of IEP to parents prior to implementation, teacher having knowledge of/access to the IEP, IEP revisions procedures, IEP components/considerations/required statements and annual reviews. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses annual reviews. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address the remaining areas because it lacks procedures and an

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administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

SECTION VIII. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of supplementary aides and services in regular education, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, regular education access, and continuum of placement options. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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

SECTION X. TRANSITION to POST- SCHOOL

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding student and agency invitations, student attendance at IEP meetings, provision and monitoring of transition services by outside agencies, agency participation at IEP meetings, statement of transition service needs, statement of needed transition services, interests/preferences and courses of study. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these issues 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 components.

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

TRANSITION from EIP to PRESCHOOL

During the self-assessment process the district identified themselves compliant in all indicators regarding EIP to preschool transition. This was verified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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SECTION IX. DISCIPLINE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, procedures for conducting manifestation determination meetings, and the provision of interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding disciplinary procedures and documentation to case managers. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 area of participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, and provision of alternative assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 IEP requirements and the provision of written notice.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of an 8th grade diploma to students in out-of-district placements and participation in graduation for students in out-of-district placements. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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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 area of group size for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size, age range, home instruction, consultation time for resource teachers, and description for special education classes. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan must be revised to include this element.

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 parent/adult student access to records, documentation of access to student records, documentation of location of other records, and procedures for maintenance of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with procedures for the destruction of pupil records and staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The improvement plan needs to be revise 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 Somers Point School District on January 9 - 11, 2002. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

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

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of public IDEA information, length of school day and year, provision of special education rules, due process rules, PRISE, and the short procedural safeguard statement, dissemination of child find information, direct referral from parents and staff, summer referrals, identification meetings, standardized assessments, provision of bilingual evaluations, reevaluations planning meeting and participants, conducting reevaluation by June 30th of last year in preschool special education program, documentation of eligibility, implementation dates, alignment of goals/objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, individualized decision-making, preschool transition, suspension tracking behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, procedures for conducting manifestation determination meetings, participation in statewide assessment, graduation requirements in students' IEPs, group size for speech, access to student records, and procedures for the maintenance/ destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, extended school year, provision of related services (speech and counseling), transfer students, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, independent evaluations, referral process (PAC and speech), vision and hearing screenings for preschoolers, multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible for speech-language services, written reports, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria for communication impaired and eligible for speech-language services, provision of written reports to parents, participants at IEP meetings, 90 day-time line for implementation, provision of IEP to parents prior to implementation, teachers having knowledge/access to the IEP, IEP revision process, IEP components/considerations/required statements, and annual review timelines, participation in nonacademic/extracurricular activities, regular education access, continuum of placement options, transition to post-school, disciplinary procedures and documentation, provision of approved accommodations/modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, provision of alternative assessments, provision of diploma and graduation participation to out-of-district students, class size, age range,

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home instruction, consultation time, description for special education classes, destruction of student records, and staff knowledge of policies and procedures regarding student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding provision of occupational therapy services, surrogate parents, health summaries and hearing/vision screenings prior to the identification meeting,

Within forty-five 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.