

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Weymouth Township School District

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: February 20 and 21, 2002

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Julia Harmelin

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Weymouth Township 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 Weymouth Township 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 Weymouth Township 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 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 Weymouth Township Elementary School on February 11, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring activities.

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. Interviews were conducted with the district's administrator, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and parents.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District Strengths:

For the past ten years, the district has implemented the Children Are People Program, which is a support group for children promoting positive self-esteem, coping skills, responsible decision-making and anger management. The program is open to disabled and non-disabled students. The group is facilitated by Atlantic Prevention Resources and the program is funded through the Municipal Alliance.

The district is further commended for its commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Programs and Services was determined to be an area 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, parent development, and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of mainstreaming for special education students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding professional development.

Area of Need:

Professional Development - During the on-site visit, staff members identified a need for professional development opportunities for regular and special education teachers in the following areas: behavior and discipline, inclusion, and accommodating students with disabilities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure instructional staff and related services personnel receive staff development regarding issues related to special education. The plan must include a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of these activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of related services other than counseling, length of school day and year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of counseling and transfer procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. On-site monitoring activities verified that these issues have been corrected. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents and written notice timelines. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of these training activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting, written notice, due process hearing rules, and meeting participants for speech.

Areas of Need:

Notice of a Meeting – During the on-site monitoring, a review of meeting notices indicated that notice of a meeting for students eligible for special education and related services does not include the statement of the parent's right to invite others with special expertise to the meeting. In addition, notice of the annual review meeting for students eligible for speech-language services does not identify the meeting participants.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of a meeting includes all the required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

IEP as Written Notice – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with district personnel indicate that the district uses the IEP as a part of written notice. A review of student records indicates that the following components of written notice are missing from this document: the options considered and rejected and the reasons why they were rejected; a statement of other relevant factors; and the short procedural safeguards statement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure written notice includes all required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Due Process Hearing Rules – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicates that written notice of the proposed evaluation for students referred for special education and related services does not include provision of the due process hearing rules. Interviews with school personnel indicate that this document has not been provided when required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a copy of the due process hearing rules is provided when the district provides written notice of a proposed evaluation. The plan must include a mechanism to document this activity. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Meeting Participants for Speech – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with district personnel indicate that the regular education teacher is not consistently in attendance at meetings for students determined for speech and language services particularly when only a few meetings are scheduled on a specific day.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers attend IEP meetings for students determined eligible for speech and language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, summer referrals, direct referrals, identification meeting participants, and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, health summaries, and vision/hearing screenings. The district's

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district further identified a concern regarding the over-representation of minority students in special education. The district will be provided with technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs regarding improvement strategies to address this issue in an effective manner.

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

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of speech-language evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. On-site monitoring has verified that this issue has been corrected.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance/rejection of reports.

Area of Need:

Acceptance/Rejection of Reports - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although the child study team has a procedure to sign the reports verifying acceptance/rejection of a report, these procedures are not be followed by staff.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include an administrative oversight component to ensure staff members comply with established district procedures regarding the acceptance/rejection of reports.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of re-evaluation planning meetings and meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. On-site monitoring verified that this issue has been corrected.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding re-evaluation for preschool students turning age five and declassification procedures for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area of Need:

Turning Age Five - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that re-evaluations are not consistently completed by June 30. Interviews indicated that staff members were unaware of this timeline.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure re-evaluations for students turning age five are completed by June 30th of the students last year in the preschool program. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Declassification Procedures - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews that the speech and language specialist does not consistently conduct a reevaluation prior to declassifying students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a reevaluation is conducted prior to determining a student is no longer eligible. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and criteria for determining eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants and notice of eligibility for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. On-site monitoring verified that these issues have been corrected.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of eligibility for speech and language services.

Area of Need:

Notice of Eligibility for Speech and Language Services - During the on-site visit, interviews with district staff indicate that written notice of eligibility for speech and language services does not include the require components. The current written notice document for eligibility includes only a record of the meeting participants. The following additional components are missing: a description of the proposed action; an explanation of why such action is being taken; a description of options considered and why they

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

were rejected; a description of the factors used in making the decision; and a description of any other relevant factors.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech and language eligibility documents include all of the required components of written notice. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, teacher access to IEPs, and alignment of goals and objectives to the CCCSs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of annual review timelines and 90-day evaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. On-site monitoring verified that these timeline issues have been corrected. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding consistency between statements of present levels of educational performance and IEP goals and objectives. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP components and oversight of IEP implementation.

Areas of Need:

IEP Components – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicated that the district's IEP format for students classified as eligible for special education and related services does not include the following components: considerations regarding the strengths of the student; concerns of the parent; a statement of behavior needs; supports for school personnel; location and duration of special education and related services; age of majority; and for in-class support services, the amount of time a resource teacher is in the regular education class.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP includes all the required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Oversight of IEP Implementation – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with district personnel and parents indicate that the district does not consistently ensure that IEPs are implemented, particularly in the area of the provision of modifications and accommodations in the regular education classroom. While the district has implemented

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

additional activities to inform teachers of their responsibilities with respect to IEP implementation, there is a lack of oversight to ensure that the modifications and accommodations are being provided on a consistent basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include an administrative oversight component to ensure the new procedures are implemented on a consistent basis.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, and participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of in-class support programs. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue 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.

Section X: Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately assessed compliance regarding agency involvement and agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the statement of transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Area of Need:

Student Invitations – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with district personnel indicate that though students are invited to transition meetings, the district does not maintain documentation of the invitation and, at times, students do not attend.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the student's invitation and demonstrates sufficient efforts to ensure student participation in meetings when transition is discussed. The plan must include an**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition-planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of special education programs by age three. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures 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 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 discipline procedures, suspension tracking, and interim alternative education settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of removals to the case manager. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue 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 behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, and manifestation determinations.

Area of Need:

BIPs/FBAs and Manifestation Determinations – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student IEPs and interviews with district personnel indicate behavior intervention plans are not developed when behavior is an issue. In addition, staff members were unable to identify the procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessments and manifestation determination meetings. Although the district has had a limited number of discipline referrals and there has not been a need to conduct a functional behavioral assessment or manifestation determination meeting, there are no written procedures in place to address these issues should it be required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that behavior intervention plans are developed for students**

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

when it is determined by the IEP team that such a plan is required. The plan must also include procedures to ensure staff members conduct functional behavior assessments and manifestation determination meetings when required. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these procedures.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in assessment and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP documentation of assessment accommodations and modifications. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

Although this district serves grades K-8 only, in-district students exiting grade 8 are provided with the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises. During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding participation of students placed in out-of-district settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

No additional areas 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, documenting access to pupil records, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff knowledge of pupil records procedures. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks appropriate procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of student records.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Location of Student Records - During the on-site visit, a review of central files indicates the district does not document the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Weymouth Township School District on February 20 and 21, 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. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify a number of 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 implementation of activities that have served to correct many of the areas identified during the self-assessment process.

Although a focus group meeting was held prior to the monitoring visit, only one parent was in attendance. Concerns were expressed by this parent regarding IEP implementation and modifications and accommodations in regular education programs. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring activities in addition to input from other parents contacted prior to and during the monitoring visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent development, related services other than counseling, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, parental consent, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, summer and direct referrals, identification meetings, evaluations, eligibility, participation in statewide assessment, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents, extended school year, written notice timelines, the referral process, overrepresentation of minorities in special education, IEP goals and objectives, transition to preschool, age 14 transition service needs, accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, and participation in graduation exercises. In addition, the district identified the following areas of need which were corrected prior to the on-site visit: counseling, transfer procedures, speech and language evaluations, timelines for annual reviews, initial evaluations, and reevaluations, meeting participants and written notice for eligibility meetings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding professional development, notice of a meeting, written notice of the IEP, due process hearing rules, meeting participants for speech, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation for students turning age 5, dismissal procedures for speech only students, notice of eligibility for speech, IEP components and oversight of IEP implementation, development of behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, and manifestation determinations, and documentation of locations of other pupil records.

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.