

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Alexandria Township

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: February 27 and 28, 2006

Monitoring Team: Vanessa Leonard and Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Alexandria Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Alexandria School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Alexandria Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an onsite monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

During the onsite visit, The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district's classification rate for students with disabilities was 13.6%, not including students eligible for speech-language services. This was slightly below the state rate of 14.6% for that same year. In addition, data from the 2004-2005 school year indicated that the district educated 64.6% of students with disabilities, ages 6-21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state rate of 42% for the same year.

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During that same school year, the district educated 66.7% of preschool students with disabilities in the district’s half-day self-contained preschool special education program. The district created the half-day preschool class as a result of the self-assessment process. However, the self-contained preschool class is the only option available in the district. The district is required to ensure that a full continuum of placement options is available for preschoolers with disabilities, including typical preschool programs.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the school district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The onsite monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the school district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant: General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Transition to Preschool and Programs and Services.

Areas Not Reviewed

These areas were not reviewed by the NJDOE because the district does not serve a population of students for whom these regulations apply:

| Section | Area |
|--------------------------|---|
| Transition to Adult Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of “needed transition services” ▪ Identification of post-secondary liaison ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes |
| Graduation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out of district participation ▪ Written notice of graduation |

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the remaining sections reviewed, were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and for students eligible for speech-language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

| Section | Areas Demonstrating Compliance |
|---|--|
| Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation ▪ Extended school year ▪ Provision of programs ▪ Transfer procedures |

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| Section | Areas Demonstrating Compliance |
|---|--|
| Procedural Safeguards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Provision of notice of a meeting ▪ Meetings ▪ Provision of written notice ▪ Content of written notice ▪ Notices in native language ▪ Interpreter at meetings |
| Location, Referral and Identification (LRI) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Health summary ▪ Identification meeting participants |
| Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS) ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Functional assessments ▪ Bilingual evaluations |
| Eligibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria |
| Individualized Education Program (IEP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ IEP required considerations and components ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation ▪ Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30 ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs) |
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district |
| Transition to Adult Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings |
| Graduation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP requirements |

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Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The areas listed below were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The improvement plan submitted by the district was implemented in several areas prior to the onsite visit. **As a result, all but one area of need identified by the district during the self-assessment was determined to be compliant during the monitoring visit.**

| Section | Area of Need | Compliance Review |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| FAPE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of related services- Students did not receive speech-language services as per IEPs. | Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance. |
| Procedural Safeguards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Independent evaluations- Independent evaluations were not consistently conducted as required. | Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance. |
| LRI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral process- Referrals for evaluations that were received during the summer months were not processed according to district procedures. ▪ Pre-referral interventions- General education teachers were not consistently provided with the intervention plan developed by the Intervention and Referral Service committee and the committee did not consistently document effectiveness of attempted interventions. ▪ Vision and hearing screenings- Results of vision and hearing screenings were not provided to the child study team for preschool-age students referred for initial evaluation. ▪ Identification meeting timelines- Meetings were not consistently held within 20 days of receipt of written requests for initial evaluations. | <p>Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance.</p> <p>Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance.</p> <p>Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance.</p> |
| Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators – Evaluators were not noting the date on reports. | Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance. |
| Eligibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale- Evaluators did not have the opportunity to document agreement | Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance. |

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| Section | Area of Need | Compliance Review |
|---------|---|--|
| | <p>or disagreement with eligibility decisions and offer rationale for disagreement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copies of evaluation reports to parents - Evaluation reports were not consistently provided to parents 10 calendar days prior to eligibility meetings. | <p>Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance.</p> |
| IEP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 90 day timelines- Initial evaluations were not completed within 90 days of parental consent. | <p>Onsite monitoring by the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities have been implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance.</p> |
| LRE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuum of programs- There are limited options for preschool students. Currently the only option available to preschool students who are eligible for special education and related services is the in-district half-day self contained program for preschoolers with disabilities. | <p>The districts improvement plan is insufficient. The improvement plan did not include an administrative oversight component to ensure that a continuum of programs is developed and maintained. The district must implement an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure that a full continuum of options is available for preschool students with disabilities.</p> |

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Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant, but were found to be noncompliant by the New Jersey Department of Education during the onsite monitoring.

| Section | Area | Improvement Activity |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Procedural Safeguards | Content of notice of a meeting- Notices did not contain a statement notifying parents that they may invite someone who is knowledgeable about their child to meetings. | The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure parents are knowledgeable of their rights. The district must revise the district notice of a meeting form to include the statement that parents may invite another person who is knowledgeable about their child to the meeting. The district is advised to review the meeting notices available on the NJDOE website. The district must also conduct administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance. |
| LRI | Child Find ages 3-21- During the onsite monitoring visit, document review indicated that the district's current child find activities only address children ages 3-5. | The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that child find activities address students ages 3-21. Improvement activities must include an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance. |
| Eligibility | Statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disability- A statement of eligibility was not consistently maintained in student files for students eligible for special education under the category of specific learning disability. | The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that the statement of eligibility for specific learning disability is developed and maintained in the student's file for initial evaluations and reevaluations. Improvement activities must include an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance. |

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| Section | Area | Improvement Activity |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | Documentation of LRE decisions- The documentation of placement decisions in IEPs did not provide sufficient information to determine if placement in the general education setting with supports was considered. | The district is directed to ensure the IEP documents: the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modification; the explanation why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate and documentation of the comparison of the benefits of placement in each setting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance. |
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs and placement decisions based on students' individual needs | Placement decisions based on students' individual needs and opportunities for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs will be reviewed as part of the verification process. |

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Summary

Onsite special education monitoring was conducted in the Alexandria Township School District on February 27 and 28, 2006. 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 acknowledged for the review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify several areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will result in correction of noncompliance.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district's classification rate for students with disabilities was 13.6%, not including students eligible for speech-language services. This was slightly below the state rate of 14.6% for that same year. In addition, data from the 2004-2005 school year indicated that the district educated 64.6% of students with disabilities, ages 6-21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state rate of 42% for the same year.

During that same school year, the district educated 66.7% of preschool students with disabilities in the district's half-day self-contained preschool special education program. The district created the half-day preschool class as a result of the self-assessment process. However, the self-contained preschool class is the only option available in the district. The district is required to ensure that a full continuum of placement options is available for preschoolers with disabilities, including typical preschool programs.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. The district makes efforts to accommodate parents' schedules when scheduling meetings. The district provides sufficient information to parents regarding student progress. Overall, parents indicated that their children are being challenged academically.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included: General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Transition to Preschool and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included:

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation
- Extended school year
- Provision of programs
- Transfer procedures
- Consent
- Implementation without undue delay
- Provision of notice of a meeting
- Meetings
- Provision of written notice
- Content of written notice
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)
- Standardized assessments
- Multi-disciplinary evaluations
- Functional assessments
- Bilingual evaluations
- Eligibility meeting participants
- Eligibility criteria
- IEP meeting participants
- IEP required considerations and components
- Implementation dates
- IEP provided to parent prior to implementation

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- Notices in native language
- Interpreters at meetings
- Health summary
- Identification meeting participants
- Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district
- IEP requirements for graduation
- Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP
- Annual reviews completed by June 30
- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
- Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of transition service needs
- Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings

Areas of need originally identified by the district, but determined to have been corrected prior to the onsite monitoring visit by the NJDOE included:

- Provision of related services
- Independent evaluations
- Referral process
- Pre-referral interventions
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Identification meeting timelines
- Written reports prepared by evaluators
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents
- 90 day timelines

During the self-assessment process, the district also identified an area of need regarding continuum of programs for preschoolers and students at the middle school.

The onsite visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards including:

- Content of notice of a meeting
- Child Find ages 3-21
- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
- Documentation of LRE decisions

Placement decisions based on students' individual needs and opportunities for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs will be reviewed during the follow-up verification of compliance by the County Office of Education.

The improvement plan submitted to OSEP has been approved. The district is expected to implement the activities described in the report to achieve compliance in the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process and the onsite visit within six months of the date of this report. Verification of compliance will be conducted by the County Office of Education.