

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Avalon School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: April 26, 2005

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Avalon School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Avalon 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 Avalon School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and district staff, at the Avalon Elementary School, on April 26, 2005. Information obtained from district staff was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the desk audit, 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, chief school administrator, special education teacher, and child study team member.

District Strengths:

In partnership with the Borough of Avalon, the Avalon Public Library Commission and the Board of Education, the district completed plans for a major addition and renovation to the Avalon School. The addition will house the Community and School Library. Additionally, rooms are included for art, music, foreign language, science, and physical education. These spaces have been designed to be used by the Library Commission when not in use by the public school.

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Data Summary:

The Avalon School District reported, in the December 1 count, a classification rate of 15.67% (17 of 109 students) for the 2003-2004 school year, which is slightly below the state average of 16.58%. A total of 43.8% (7 of the 17 students) are educated in the general education classes for more than 80% of their school day. This exceeds the state average of 41.9%. Another 7 are in general education classes between 40 and 80% of the day.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of hearing aide policy. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has brought about correction in this area.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parent policy. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find ages 3-21 and pre-referral interventions. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, maintenance of records, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets and documentation of locations of other records. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate it has brought about correction in these areas.

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

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Summary

A desk audit for special education monitoring was conducted in the Avalon School District on April 26, 2005. The purpose of the desk audit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that requires no revision, as the district has corrected all of the areas of need originally identified in the self-assessment. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, all of the identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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.

A review of data indicated that the district has a low percentage of students in special education programs, although the district has very low enrollment. The district provides appropriate programs and services, with the majority of students with disabilities in general education programs.

Although no parents attended the parent focus group meeting, phone contact with parents indicated satisfaction with the district's programs and services.

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEP, LRE, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, and Programs and Services were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certification, consent, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, parent/adult student access to records, maintenance of records, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding hearing aides policy, surrogate parent policy, child find ages 3-21, prereferral interventions, access sheets, and documentation of locations of other records. Although these areas were initially identified as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has brought about correction in all areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit. As a result, the improvement plan submitted in June, 2004 will be submitted for approval. No further action regarding the improvement plan by the district is necessary at this time.