

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

District: Caldwell-West Caldwell School District **County:** Essex

Monitoring Dates: December 3, 2003

Monitoring Team: Michelle Davis, Barbara Tucker, Deborah Masarsky
and Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Caldwell-West Caldwell School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Caldwell-West Caldwell 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 Caldwell-West Caldwell 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 community members at the Harrison School on October 2, 2003. 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, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the **Project Partner Program**. This peer mentoring program for all students in grades one through four is designed to foster "students helping students." Students and teachers participating in this character education/social skills program adopt a yearly focus on which group discussions, peer mentoring and

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

lesson planning is based. The theme for the 2003-2004 school year is "Stop Bullying in My School, How Can I Make a Difference."

The district is further commended for the **CANDO** Program which is a special education parent organization that works cooperatively with the Director of Special Education to provide support to parents of children with special needs by educating parents about their rights as well as sharing information by having a variety of speakers discuss relevant special education topics and issues. The group organizes recreational activities for classified students to provide a supportive school environment for these youngsters. Additionally, the organization meets annually with the district Board of Education, the Superintendent and the Director of Special Education to assess the district's progress regarding its special education initiatives.

Data Summary:

The Caldwell-West Caldwell School District is commended for maintaining a classification rate that has been below the state average over the last three years. More than 48% of the district's special needs students were educated in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day during the 2002-2003 school year. The district exceeded the state average by approximately 6% in this area. The district is further commended for developing an improvement plan which continues this positive trend through the hiring and training of additional staff to expand the availability of supplementary aids and services and ensure the provision of programs and services in the least restrictive environment.

A review of data for the HSPA indicated that slightly more than 66% of students with disabilities scored proficient in Language Arts Literacy and approximately 52% scored proficient or advanced proficient in Mathematics. Additionally, data submitted by the district indicated that the graduation rate for students with disabilities has steadily increased from 80% to 96% and the dropout rate has steadily decreased by 3.5% over the last three years. Finally, the district is commended for ensuring 100% parental participation in IEP meetings.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation 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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training and dissemination of IDEA Information. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, goals and objectives and frequency, duration and location of related services, length of the school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of related services, hearing aids and transfer students. Although these areas were initially identified by the district as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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, content and provision of notices of meetings, content of written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of provision of written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district also identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find activities, direct referrals from parent and staff and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district also identified concerns in the areas of health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines. Although these areas were initially identified by the district as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance/rejection of reports. Although the district initially identified this as an area on need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 areas of eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled and signatures of agreement or disagreement with rationale.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to the IEP meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 areas of IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of present levels of education performance, measurable goals and objectives and teacher responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of IEPs to parents and teachers prior to implementation.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of IEPs to Parents and Teachers Prior to Implementation – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff that although initial IEPs, annuals reviews and three-year reevaluations are completed within the required timelines and parents are provided with appropriate written notice and a “draft IEP” of the student’s program, there is often a delay in the provision of the finalized IEP to parents and teachers.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents are provided with the final IEP and teachers have access to this IEP prior to implementation. The implementation of this activity will ensure that parents are fully informed of the details regarding the program and services being provided to their children and that teachers are able to appropriately implement the IEP to ensure their students receive the agreed upon program and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activity.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision making process, LRE documentation, regular education access for in-district students, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of consideration of supplementary aids and services. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of statements of Transition Service Needs and Needed Transition Services, preferences and interest survey/assessment and student invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of agency invitation and participation. Although the district initially identified this as an area on need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and Early Intervention Program to pre-school disabled program by age three.

No additional areas 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 suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative education settings, 45-day return and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation to case manager. Although the district initially identified this as an area on need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternative proficiency assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of the content of the statewide assessment. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 out-of-district student participation.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through a review of records and interviews with staff that although graduation requirements are discussed at the IEP meeting, the district does not provide parents and/or adult students with appropriate written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the timely provision of notice of graduation to parents and/or adult students. It is recommended that the district adopt the graduation notice form developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The implementation of this activity will ensure that parents and/or adult students are fully informed that graduation is a change in placement that may be disputed through due process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activity.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class description and sufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 access/requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Student Records in Other Locations – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through a review of records and interviews with staff that the district does not identify the location of other student records in the central files.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include an activity to ensure that the central file documents the location of other student records maintained by the district. The implementation of this activity will ensure that parents and/or adult students are made aware of 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 Caldwell-West Caldwell School District on December 3, 2003. 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 Caldwell-West Caldwell School District is to be commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of the improvement plan activities to address some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. 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 many positive trends over the last three years. These trends include classification rates that are consistently below the state average, placements in general education settings that are above the state average, and increases in proficiency scores in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics on the HSPA. The district has also increased its graduation rate and decreased its dropout rate. Furthermore, the district has ensured 100% parental participation rate in IEP meetings. The district is commended for developing an improvement plan which continues these positive trends.

Reevaluation was an areas determined to be compliant with all of the standards.

A focus group meeting held on October 2, 2003 was attended by approximately 40 parents and several teachers, child study team members and administrators. Parents feel that they are involved in the development of the IEP and that the child study team accepts parental input. Parents reported that the quality of special education at the elementary level is comparable to the district's general education programs. However, parents do not believe that students with special needs at the high school level are provided with the same quality of education and resources as their non-disabled peers. Students are involved in school activities and have access to regular education programs. Parents feel that the district provides adequate transition services, although, one parent stated that the district is lacking a transition coordinator to effectively monitor the process. Pre-school-aged students are placed in programs by age three and parents seem pleased with the district's pre-school disabled program. Parents expressed concern regarding the effect budgetary constraints may have on the district's ability to continue to provide quality special education programs. Moreover, parents feel that as a result of the ongoing budgetary concerns, the authority to make program decisions "rests in the hands" of the administration and not with the IEP team. Overall, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, extended school year, provision of programs, goals and objectives and frequency, duration and location of related services, length of the school day/year, facilities, certifications, child find activities, direct referrals from parent and staff, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, signed and dated reports, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled, signatures of agreement or

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

disagreement with rationale, IEP meetings/participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, decision making process, LRE documentation, regular education access for in-district students, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, statements of Transition Service Needs and Needed Transition Services, preferences and interest survey/assessment, student invitation, pre-school transition planning conference, Early Intervention Program to pre-school disabled program by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative education settings, 45-day return, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternative proficiency assessment, IEP requirements, out-of-district student participation, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access/requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA Information, provision of related services, hearing aids, transfer students, surrogate parents, provision of written notice, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, acceptance/rejection of reports, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to the IEP meeting, present levels of education performance, measurable goals and objectives, teacher responsibility, consideration of supplementary aids and services, agency invitation and participation, documentation to case manager, staff knowledge of the content of the statewide assessment, class description and sufficient staff.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding IEPs to parents and teacher prior to implementation, written notice of graduation and documentation of student records in other locations.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Caldwell-West Caldwell School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.