

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Camden County Technical Schools

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: January 7, 8, and 9, 2002

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Julia Harmelin

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Camden County Technical Schools conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Camden County Technical Schools 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 Camden County Technical Schools 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 the Gloucester Township Campus on January 3, 2002. This information was used in addition to the self-assessment document 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. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals and vice principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and parents.

District Strengths:

The district operates the Renaissance Program, which acknowledges good attendance, academic achievement, and exemplary behavior for all students. The program provides

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a number of incentive activities, including roller-skating parties, carnivals, and rallies for students who meet the program criteria.

The district operates a Peer Mediation Program, which encourages students to conduct conflict resolution sessions with other students who are having behavior difficulties. This student-run program conducts approximately 200-300 sessions per year, resulting in fewer formal discipline referrals.

The district conducts a school-wide reading program called D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read) for all classes. For twenty minutes of every school day, everyone, including staff, participate in reading activities. These activities are included in students' English grades.

The district should be commended for its commitment to establishing programs that address the diverse career needs of students with disabilities.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of special education policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. Although the district's improvement plan did not specifically identify a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts, on-site monitoring indicated that the district has a successful mechanism in place.

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

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and provision of related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district also identified concerns regarding transfer procedures and facilities. Improvement plan activities to address transfer procedures do not sufficiently address this issue because an oversight component is lacking. The district's improvement plan does not address the facilities issue. The plan must be revised to include these components.

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

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notice of a meeting, content of written notice, and documentation of attempts to secure parent participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site monitoring, it was verified that these activities have been implemented and these issues have been corrected. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, consent for reevaluation, provision of procedural safeguards, and native language. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan must be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of notice of initial evaluation plans and timelines for written notice following an IEP meeting.

Areas of Need:

Written Notice of an Initial Evaluation Plan – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was indicated that though parents receive written notice of an initial evaluation plan, that provision is not consistently documented in the student record.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of the provision of initial evaluation plans to parents. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice Following an IEP Meeting – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews that the district uses the IEP as notice. It was further determined that although parents receive copies of the IEPs, they do not receive them within 15 days of the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs are provided to parents within 15 days of the meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding students referred for evaluation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district also identified concerns regarding Child Find and students who are identified as potentially disabled. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks in-service training as well as an administrative oversight component. The plan must be revised to include these components. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding speech referrals. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because the plan indicates that screenings will be conducted to determine eligibility for students transferring into the program. The plan needs to be revised to ensure that results of speech screenings are not used to determine eligibility.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meetings for speech.

Area of Need:

Identification Meetings for Speech – During the on-site visit, an interview with the speech therapist indicated that identification meetings are not held when students are referred for a speech and language evaluation. Instead, a phone contact is made to the parent and required paperwork is sent home.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are conducted within required timelines and with the appropriate participants when students are referred for a speech and language evaluation. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of components of evaluation reports, acceptance and rejection of outside evaluations, speech evaluations, and assessment in all areas of suspected disability. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues because it lacks in-service

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training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluation planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of concern regarding reevaluation timelines and proceeding without undue delay once parental consent is obtained. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues..

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, meeting participants for initial eligibility, and provision of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of concern regarding criteria for determining eligibility for speech-language services and determination of severe discrepancy for students with learning disabilities. The district's improvement plan did not address criteria for speech eligibility. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. Additionally, the improvement plan for severe discrepancy is insufficient because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation dates, 90-day evaluation timelines and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, IEP components, notification of transfer of rights at the age of majority, annual review timelines, IEP revisions, and provision of IEPs to parents prior to program implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. On-site monitoring has determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction of these issues. The district also identified concerns regarding IEP goals and objectives and their connection to the core curriculum content standards, identification of goals and objectives for related services and procedures for allowing parents to observe proposed placements prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues because it requires more reasonable timelines and an administrative oversight component regarding issues related to goals and objectives and more specific activities are required to ensure that parents are afforded the opportunity to observe proposed student placements. The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district further identified concerns with annual review timelines. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue as it relates to high school seniors because it lacks appropriate procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of participation in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities, documentation of the Oberti considerations, and provision of supplemental aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding individualized decision-making and continuum of services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was noted that the district has already implemented some of these activities.

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

Section X: Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of courses of study and the statement of transition service needs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitations, documentation of agency involvement, statement of needed transition services, and monitoring the implementation of transition plans. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. On-site monitoring verified that the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of documenting student invitations. The district also identified concerns regarding

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documentation of student interests and preferences. 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 district further identified concerns regarding individualized transition planning. The district's improvement plan did not address this issue. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, documentation of removals to case managers, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and placement in interim alternative education settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of suspension tracking and development of behavior intervention plans. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the development of behavior plans. The district's plan to address suspension tracking is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include that component.

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 IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student participation in assessments, provision of approved accommodations and modifications, alternate assessment, CST knowledge of content of statewide assessments, and participation in the SRA process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 documentation, student participation, and provision of written notice.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student choice of receiving a diploma from the district of residence. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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 areas of age range and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size, provision of team teaching programs and supplemental instruction, and provision of OT/PT services when required. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues 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. The district further identified an area of concern regarding group size for speech therapy. On-site monitoring determined the district has already implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of this area of need.

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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding procedures for maintenance and destruction of records for students classified as eligible for special education and related services and procedures for informing parents of records procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns in the areas of documenting access to pupil records and informing staff of records procedures. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues 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 documentation of locations.

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Area of Need:

Location of Student Records - During the on-site visit, a review of central files indicated 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 the district documents the location of other records maintained by the district in the central files. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Camden County Technical Schools on January 7, 8, and 9, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed satisfaction with the district's programs. Some concerns were raised regarding parent, teacher and district communication. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during this meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, certification, independent evaluations, identification meetings for CST referrals, multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, meetings for reevaluation and eligibility, initial evaluation timelines, teacher access to IEPs, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, provision of supplemental aids and services, procedures for discipline, written notice of graduation, age range, homebound instruction, and access to pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, extended school year, related services, transfer procedures, facilities, notice of a meeting and written notice, parental consent, native language, referral process, Child Find, components of evaluation reports, documentation of acceptance and rejections of reports, speech evaluations, reevaluation timelines, meeting participants, eligibility criteria, IEP components, annual reviews, least restrictive environment and continuum of services, transition planning, procedures for suspension tracking and development of behavior intervention plans, participation in statewide assessments and provision of required accommodations and modifications, class size, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding timelines for provision of notice of an IEP meeting, notice of proposed evaluation, identification meetings for speech, and documentation of locations of 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.