

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

District: Cape May City School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: October 7 & 8, 2002

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Cape May City School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Cape May City 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 Cape May City 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 Cape May City Elementary School on September 24, 2002. 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, speech therapists, child study team members, and parents.

District Strengths:

The district provides educational services to the United States Coast Guard Station. Slightly more than 50% of its student population comes from the Coast Guard families stationed in Cape May City. The Coast Guard families provide the district with a wide range of expertise and know how. They volunteer their time in the classrooms and

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assist teachers and students with computer technology, building nature trails, planning a variety of gardens that the fourth graders plant, and serving as tutors and guest readers. The Coast Guard families have also provided a pool of needed employees – one to one aides, instructional aides, and interpreters.

The district is commended for sponsoring a number of innovative programs that include basic skills instruction in the classroom through an inclusion model, an after-school homework club, the K-Kids (a Kiwanis youth services club), a peer leadership program and a camp sponsored through a countywide Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) grant (peer leaders teach a lesson on leadership to students in younger grades).

In preparation for IEP meetings, the child study team members provide parents with a pre-IEP questionnaire that asks for their input regarding student strengths, needs, projected goals and services for the coming year. Interviews with district staff and parents indicate that this process has enhanced the development of the IEP by making it a more collaborative process.

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

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Transition, 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 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 areas of professional development for general education teachers and paraprofessionals. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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, related services, length of school day and year, oversight of IEP implementation, facilities, and certification.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of FM/easy listener systems. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns regarding procedures for transfer students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 surrogate parents, consent, meetings, and independent evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the components of notices of meetings and written notice, and the provision of notices and written notice in native language.

Area(s) of Need:

Notices of Meetings/Written Notices – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that notices do not contain the required components and statements. For example, a statement that the parent has the right to invite other individuals with knowledge or expertise, identification, by discipline, of the participants who will be attending the meeting, a statement that at the reevaluation planning meeting if no additional assessments are warranted an IEP will be developed, and the reevaluation plan notice does not inform the parents of their rights to request additional assessments.

- **The district will revise its notices of meetings and written notices to ensure they contain the required statements and components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Notices in Native Language – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that the district translates the notices of meetings over the phone to the parents and provides translators at meetings but does not provide notices in the native language of parents, when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides notices of meetings in the native language of parents, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-5, direct referral by parents and staff, and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of PAC/pre-referral interventions, and health/medical summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding identification meeting participants and the provision of vision and hearing screenings prior to the identification meeting. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding child find for school aged students.

Area of Need:

Child Find for School Aged Students – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of documentation indicated that the district does not provide child find information to parents of school aged students in the Cape May Elementary School or to students in nonpublic schools.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides child find information to parents of school aged students in both public and nonpublic schools. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 assessment, bilingual evaluations, functional assessment for eligible for speech/language services, and written reports for eligible for speech/language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments, written reports, and changes in evaluation plans.

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Areas of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the district does not consistently conduct a functional assessment that includes a structured observation in other than a testing session.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts structured observations in other than a testing session. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the child study team members are not dating their assessment reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure child study team members date their assessment reports. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Changes to the Nature and Scope of the Evaluation – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that when additional specialized assessments are required after the nature and scope of the initial evaluation plan has been determined and consented to by the parents, written notice proposing a change to the evaluation plan is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides written notice of the proposed change to the nature and scope of the initial evaluation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings, participants at the planning meeting, and conducting a reevaluation prior to a student with a disability turning age 5.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the use of informal measures as part of a functional assessment for reevaluation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this element.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at eligibility meetings, criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents. 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 participants, considerations and required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, and teachers having access and knowledge of IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of relating goals and objectives to the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, regular education access, and continuum for students with disabilities above the age of 5.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of regular education placement options for preschool students with disabilities. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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.

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, notification to case managers, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of procedural rights for identified students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of location of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Cape May City School District on October 7 & 8, 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 bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit and through parent telephone interviews, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, especially the provision of special education and related services in the general education classroom settings.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year services, provision of related services, length of school day and year, oversight of IEP implementation, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, conducting reevaluation prior to the student turning age 5, eligibility meetings, participants, eligibility criteria, documentation of eligibility, participants at IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher having access and knowledge of IEPs, individualized decision making, regular education access, placement continuum for school aged students, preschool transition planning conference, transition from early intervention to preschool special education services by age 3, discipline, statewide assessment, graduation (Pre K-6), program and services, parent/adult student access to student records, and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development for general education teachers and paraprofessionals, transfer students, provision of FM/easy listener systems, PAC/pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, informal measures component of functional assessment, acceptance and rejection of reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents, relating goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards, regular education placement options for preschoolers with disabilities, documentation of removal to case manager, documentation of other location of student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notices of meetings, written notice, native language, child find, functional assessments and evaluation reports.

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

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