

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

District: Cedar Grove Public School District

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: March 10, 11 and 12, 2003

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Janet Wright and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Cedar Grove School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Cedar Grove 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 Cedar Grove 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 on March 3, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for earning a Best Practice Award for comprehensive staff development and its continuing dedication to providing staff development. The district has adopted the model that ensures the provision of multiple pathways for professional growth.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district is also commended for the "Crossing Boundaries" program, which is funded by a grant received by the middle school. This program provides professional staff development for all teachers in the middle school and concentrates on implementing interdisciplinary and multisensory experiences for all students.

The district is also commended for the *Infused Initiative*, a theme-based learning program implemented through the interactive use of technology. Cedar Grove School district won an Excellence in Education Award for this program.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Discipline and Statewide Assessments 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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day and year, transfer students and certifications.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit, regarding extended school year, provision of speech therapy services and facilities. The county office has been notified of the facilities issues.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that extended school year is offered to all special education elementary and out-of-district students. However, it is not considered for any student at the secondary level.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year services are considered for all students and provided when necessary. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Speech Services - During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that speech services cease at the end of May. A review of IEPs indicated the speech therapist conducts observations and does paperwork during the entire month of June.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that therapy services are provided through the end of the school year. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the speech therapist conducts other activities, such as conducting observations and completing paperwork, in addition to the provision of services and not in place of**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

providing those services. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process for students eligible for special education and related services, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants for students eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding referral process and identification meeting participants and timelines for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Referral Process- During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that the results of the kindergarten screening process for speech issues that are obtained in April at the kindergarten registration are being used as a referral for an evaluation for speech services. However, this referral is not addressed until the following September.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that referrals for speech and language services are addressed within twenty days by conducting an identification meeting and developing the nature and scope of the evaluation should the participants believe an evaluation is warranted. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews the indicated that instead of conducting an identification meeting with the required participants, the speech therapists contact parents by telephone in September for permission to evaluate.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted with the required participants to determine the need for a speech evaluation, to determine the nature and scope of the evaluation and to obtain parental consent to the evaluation. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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 for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluations for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that teacher input and teacher interviews are inconsistently included in the speech and language evaluation reports. In addition, the speech therapists are conducting informal observations prior to obtaining consent to evaluate.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech and language evaluations include all required components such as a teacher interview and the written statement regarding the impact of the speech problem on the student's educational performance. The procedures must further ensure parental consent is obtained prior to conducting any part of the evaluation process, such as an observation of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, staff interviews indicated that although there is a form that is available to document the acceptance and/or rejection of outside reports, team members are only using the form to accept reports. They are not documenting their rejection of reports or providing parents with a written rationale for their rejection.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that independent or outside evaluations are accepted or rejected in whole or in part and that that acceptance/rejection is clearly documented. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meeting and participants at planning meeting.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluations planning meeting participants for preschool students.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Preschool Reevaluations – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that regular education teachers are not in attendance at reevaluation planning meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure general education teachers participate in reevaluation planning meetings for preschool students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding criteria for specific learning disabilities (SLD) and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Criteria for SLD – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district has not developed procedures to determine the existence of a severe discrepancy to establish eligibility under the category of SLD.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district is able to determine the existence of a severe discrepancy to establish eligibility under the category of SLD. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Copy of Evaluation Reports to Parents – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that copies of evaluation reports are not being sent to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meetings. In addition, parents are being asked to waive the timely receipt of these reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of age of majority.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility for IEPs. The district's improvement plan for participants and teacher access and responsibility is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in the area of teacher access and responsibility. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of considerations and required statements because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district further identified concerns in the area of ninety-day timelines due to parent unavailability, missed appointments and illness. **The district did not submit procedures to address this area. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives for replacement classes and annual review IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the district is not developing goals and objectives for subjects that are taught in a replacement resource program. Instead, the district indicates that replacement programs will follow the general education curriculum.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that goals and objectives are developed for subjects that are taught in a replacement resource center program. The plan must further ensure these goals and objectives are aligned to the core curriculum content standards with all required modifications and adaptations as determined necessary. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

Annual Review IEPs – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that all annual reviews are conducted during the last two months of the school year. Though the IEP includes the program that will be implemented in September, it does not include a program that will be implemented from the date of the annual review to the end of the current school year. As a result, these students do not have a current IEP in place for the last two months of the school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure annual review IEPs include programs to complete the current school year as well as programs for the current school year. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of supplemental aids and services and regular education access for preschool. The district identified barriers that included the lack of sufficient aids and services to maintain students in the general education setting and the lack of collaboration with community-based preschool settings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of supplemental aids and services because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of regular education access for preschool students because it lacks procedures to establish relationships with community-based programs as well as an in-service component to ensure team members consider placement in these programs as a first option.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components

No additional area of need was 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 courses of study, preferences and interests and age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of student agency invitations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding age fourteen transition service needs.

Area(s) of Need:

Age Fourteen Transition Service Needs – During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that age fourteen transition service needs were inconsistently included in the IEPs for students turning age fourteen during the period the IEP would be in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students turning age fourteen during the period of time the IEP is in effect have a transition service needs section included in their IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three. 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 graduation requirements, choice of diploma and out-of-district participation in graduation activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 waivers, group sizes and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size waivers, consultation time, staffing, case management time, team teaching models and class descriptions. The district's improvement plan for class sizes and waivers and team teaching models is sufficient to address these areas. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of case management and collaboration time because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. **In addition, the district's improvement plan for class descriptions must be revised to include an activity to submit class descriptions to the county office.** The plan needs to be revised to include this activity. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of staffing because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure it has sufficient staff to provide programs and services on a continuous basis.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access and requests for records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the central files identify 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 Cedar Grove School District on March 10, 11 and 12, 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 district is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the implementation of activities to correct areas of need identified during the self-assessment process and 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 and in telephone interviews conducted prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Several parents did express concerns with the continuum of programs available within the district, especially at the preschool level. In addition, classroom space was identified as an issue of concern. The district is addressing the issue with the projected completion of the middle school building project in 2004.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, length of day and year, transfer students, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process for eligible for special education and related service, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants for students eligible for special education and related services, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements, age of majority, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, courses and preferences, age sixteen needed transition services, pre-school transition planning conference discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, age range and waivers, group sizes, home instruction, access to student records and request for records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding related services, IEP participants, consideration and required statements, ninety-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, supplemental aids and services, regular education access for preschool, student and agency invitations, transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, consultation time, staffing, case management time, team teaching models and class descriptions.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding, extended school year, provision of speech services, facilities, referral process for students eligible for speech and language services, identification meeting timelines and participants for students eligible for speech and language services, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluations completed by June 30th, severe discrepancy formula, copy of evaluation reports to parents, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, annual review IEPs, age fourteen transition service needs and documentation of other location.

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