

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

District: Clark School District **County:** Union

Monitoring Dates: May 10, 2005

Monitoring Team: Barbara J. Tucker and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Clark School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Clark School District with an opportunity to evaluate strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and,
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Clark 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 Clark High School, on May 10, 2005.

During the monitoring process, the NJDOE monitors reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, speech/language specialists and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, child study team members and speech-language specialists. Additionally, phone interviews were conducted with a number of the district's parents.

Data Summary:

A three year review of the district data indicated that between 2001 and 2003, the average classification rate for students ages 3-21, was 4.0% below the state average of 14.3%. The district's data also indicated that 63% of the district's preschool disabled population was educated in segregated settings. The district identified this as an area of need during the self-assessment process and is in the process of taking steps to address the issue. Placement rates for the 2002-2003 school year for students ages 6-

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21, indicated that 48% of the students were educated with their non-disabled peers for at least 80% of the day, compared to the statewide average of nearly 42%. The district's graduation rate was 100% for the 2001-2002 school year and 90% for the 2002-2003 school year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluations, Discipline, Graduation and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring process.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications and hearing aides.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of goals and objectives for related services. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and requests for independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings/written notice. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary/vision screenings, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child find information. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting/participants, statement of specific learning discrepancy eligibility and signatures of agreement/disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of copies of evaluation reports to 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 compliance in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the monitoring process regarding criteria for specific learning discrepancy.

Area(s) of Need:

Criteria for Specific Learning Discrepancy-During the monitoring process it was determined that the district uses a variety of discrepancy formulas to determine whether a student has a learning disability.

- **The improvement plan will be revised to ensure that the district identifies a valid research-based model which will result in consistency in the identification of students with learning disabilities.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings/participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding copies of IEPs to 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, general education access, notification to out-of-district students regarding non-academic/extra-curricular activities in district and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of regular education access for preschoolers. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of transition statements, interests/preferences and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of student invitation. 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 compliance in this area.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of early intervention to preschool by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of preschool transition planning conference. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, 45-day interim alternative placements and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding documentation of written notice to the case manager. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of student participation, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment and staff knowledge.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding use of special review assessment. The district has developed an improvement plan which is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class sizes/waivers, age range waivers, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time for in-class support teachers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of insufficient staff, team teaching and description of new programs to county office. 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 compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Clark School District on May 10, 2005. 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 Clark School District is highly commended for the outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas of need during the self-assessment process and for developing an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of improvement plan activities which it has already undertaken to bring about compliance.

For the last three years, the Clark School District has maintained a classification rate for students ages 3-21, which has averaged 4.0% below the state. The district is to be commended for its efforts in this area. Additionally, between 2001 and 2003 the data indicated that 63% of the district's preschoolers with disabilities were educated in segregated settings, while 48% of students ages 6-21, were educated with their non-disabled peers for at least 80% of the day. The district has identified least restrictive environment for preschoolers as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan to address the issue.

At a focus group meeting held on May 10, 2005, parents stated that they were generally pleased with the choices for special education students representing the full continuum of programs. They also stated that they were impressed with general education teachers' reception of special needs students, as well as special education staff's "helpfulness." Most parents acknowledged that the district has the individual needs of children as its priority. Many parents felt that the district both "welcomed and encouraged" their high level of involvement.

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluations, Discipline, Graduation and Student Records were determined to be areas demonstrating compliance with all standards by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, hearing aides, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, requests for independent evaluations, referral process, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary/vision screenings, identification meeting timelines/participants, eligibility meeting/participants, statement of Specific Learning Discrepancy, signatures of agreement/disagreement, IEP meetings/participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, general education access, notification to out-of-district students regarding non-academic/extra-curricular activities in district, continuum of programs, transition statements, interests/preferences, agency invitation, of early intervention to preschool by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, 45-day interim alternative placements, procedural safeguards, student participation, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP

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documentation, alternate assessment , staff knowledge, class sizes/waivers, age range waivers, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time for in-class support teachers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding documentation of goals and objectives for related services, surrogate parents, notices of meetings/written notice, child find information, evaluation reports to parents, copies of IEPs to parents, regular education access for preschoolers, student invitation, preschool transition planning conference, documentation of written notice to the case manager, use of special review assessment, areas of insufficient staff, team teaching and description of new programs to county office.

The monitoring process identified an additional area of need within the evaluation standard regarding identification of a formula for determining specific learning discrepancy.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Clark School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the area that requires revision.