

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

**District:** Clifton

**County:** Passaic

**Monitoring Dates:** January 8 – 12, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** Stephanie DeBruyne, Cecelia Downey, Karen Ellmore, Joshua Gillenson, Melinda Zangrillo

**Background Information**

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Clifton School District conducted a self-assessment to determine if the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

In 1999, the parents and staff were invited to attend a public focus group meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Based on the information collected by the district, a self-assessment report was developed citing strengths and areas of need. The district has developed activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas of need identified in their report.

A second public focus group meeting was held in the district on December 14, 2000 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had several concerns.

**District Strengths**

The district has made progress in decreasing the classification rate, from 10.9% in 1996 to 10.6% in 1998. To decrease the classification rate, the district has increased its professional development to more effectively address interventions in the regular education classroom. Training was provided to regular education staff with professional development in instructional strategies and adaptations for students with disabilities. Principals have had trainings with the Director of Special Services every other month throughout this school year. The district has also established a relationship with Montclair State University to provide additional professional development opportunities. Furthermore, the Educational Support Council (ESC), the pre-referral intervention program, has been established and implemented in each of the schools in the district.

## **Sections Demonstrating Compliance In All Standards**

**Graduation Requirements** 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:**

The district has submitted the required policies and procedures to the Department of Education, and is awaiting final approval. Information regarding IDEA eligibility is made available to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified additional in-service training needs of regular education teachers, special education teachers, and principals. The improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need. The plan needs to be revised to include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training sessions.

### **Section II: Free Appropriate Public Education**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of related services. The improvement plan sufficiently addresses this area of need. The district also identified a need regarding the processing of transfer students. However, the improvement plan needs further revision.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the consideration and provision of extended school year programs and appropriate facilities for instruction.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Transfer Students** - During the self-assessment process, the district identified that when a student with a disability transfers into the district, the child study team conducts an immediate review of the evaluation material and the IEP. However, the district indicated that principals and school personnel do not know the procedure, and that placement of students is not always initiated in accordance with these procedures. Furthermore, the district identified that interim IEPs are not consistently developed. Though the improvement plan addresses the review of procedures, it does not address the development of interim IEPs or how the procedure will be monitored.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the placement of transfer students into programs that are either consistent with the current IEP or with an interim IEP. The procedure must include an oversight component to ensure compliance with this procedure by building level administrators.**

**Extended School Year** – During the public focus group meeting, parents reported that extended school year (ESY) services were not available for all students throughout the district. Interviews with child study team members and teachers indicated that ESY programs are not consistently considered for all students with disabilities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that extended school year services are considered on an individualized basis for all students with disabilities and that these individualized considerations are documented in the IEP.**

**Appropriate Facilities** – During on-site school visits, concerns regarding the appropriate use of instructional space were identified in a number of schools. The county office of education has been notified of these issues.

### **Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need related to timelines (which are addressed in subsequent sections), age of majority, and written notices to parents. The improvement plan is not sufficient to fully address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding native language and components of written notice.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Written Notice issues** – The district’s self-assessment document identified a need to revise its notices. The improvement plan does not include an activity to address these areas of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure their notices include all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**
- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure parents and students are apprised of the transfer of rights at least three years before the student reaches the age of majority.**

**Native Language** – Interviews with district staff indicated that in the case of non-English or limited English-speaking families, translators are used to ensure that parents understand documents and meeting discussions. However, a review of student files indicated meeting notices, evaluations, and other written communications are in English, even when translation of these documents is feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure written communications, including notices, are provided in the native language, when feasible.**

#### **Section IV: Location, Referral, and Identification**

##### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding Child Find procedures (identification of homeless and migrant children), the referral process (procedures to be followed by the CSTs upon receipt of a referral), identification meetings (20-day timeline, and participants), and health summaries by nurses in preparation for an identification meeting. The improvement plan is sufficient to address the child find issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding direct referrals.

##### **Areas of Need:**

**Referral Procedures** - The district's self-assessment identified a need to revise its referral procedures. The improvement plan does not include activities to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure referrals are addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure full compliance with these procedures by instructional and administrative staff as well as by team members.**

**Identification Meetings** – The district's self-assessment identified a need to develop a better procedure for monitoring the 20-day timeline for conducting identification meetings. While the improvement plan indicates the district has a database to monitor the 20-day timeline, it does not identify a component to ensure a system of oversight.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted within 20-days of receipt of the referral. The plan must identify the individual(s) responsible to monitor the implementation of this procedure.**

**Health summaries** – The district’s self-assessment identified a need to develop a procedure to obtain a health summary from school nurses. The improvement plan includes revision of health summary forms but does not identify the procedures that are intended to be used to ensure this information is provided in a timely manner to the teams.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure health summaries are obtained and provided to the teams prior to the identification meeting.**

**Direct referrals by school staff** – Interviews with staff during on-site monitoring indicated they are unable to make direct referrals to child study teams, but must first refer to the district’s general education intervention system.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff have the option of referring a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting to determine whether an evaluation is warranted. The plan must address how staff will be informed of these procedures.**

## **Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment an area of need was identified regarding observations as part of a functional assessment. However, the improvement plan does not specify activities that would correct this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding components of functional assessments and the determination of the language used for an assessment.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Functional Assessments** – During the on-site, a review of files indicated that written reports for students found eligible for speech/language services were frequently missing information regarding structured observations, interviews, and previous interventions. Similarly, reports for students eligible for special education and related services were frequently lacking the same information.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure evaluations include all required functional components.**

**Assessment Language** – A review of records during the on-site visit indicated that for students whose native language is other than English, there was no documentation to indicate how the language of the assessment was determined.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure student records include documentation of the district's determination of the appropriate language of assessment in the event the student's native language is other than English.**

## **Section VI: Reevaluation**

### **Summary of Findings:**

The self-assessment identified meeting timelines as an area of need. The improvement plan appropriately addresses this area of need.

## **Section VII: Eligibility**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding teacher participation at eligibility meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. Additionally, the self-assessment identified areas of need related to the provision of reports to parents and issues with the determination of eligibility criteria. However, the improvement plan does not include activities to address these areas of need.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Copy of Evaluation Reports** – Though the district self-assessment indicated that copies of evaluation reports are not consistently given to parents, the district did not include an activity to correct this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents receive copies of evaluation reports at the time the student's eligibility is determined.**

**Criteria for Eligibility** – Though the district indicated a need for child study teams to follow a more appropriate method to determine eligibility categories, the improvement plan did not include an activity to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child study team members determine eligibility categories in accordance with the criteria established in N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The plan will include staff development activities to ensure the appropriate implementation of this procedure.**

## **Section VIII: Individualized Education Program**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that IEPs are not being provided to parents in a timely manner due to the lack of secretarial support. This was an area of concern reported by parents at the public focus group meeting. The district further identified areas of need regarding participants in IEP meetings, documentation of considerations and required statements within the IEP and relating goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards. The district has developed an improvement plan that will sufficiently address these areas of need.

The district further identified an area of need regarding the development of measurable goals and objectives. The district has developed an improvement plan that is not sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site regarding IEPs for students determined eligible for speech and language services.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Goals and Objectives** - A review of IEPs generated after May 2000 utilizing a new format determined that teams were more appropriately addressing the considerations and required statements. However, the review also determined that goals and objectives were not measurable and were not consistently developed for related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure team members develop goals and objectives that are measurable. The plan must also ensure goals and objectives are developed for all related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

**Documentation of Considerations and Required Statements - ESLS** – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of IEPs for students determined eligible for speech/language services indicated that IEPs are not developed with the appropriate considerations and do not contain the required statements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs for students determined eligible for speech and language services contain all of the considerations and required statements. It is recommended the district compare its newly purchased IEP format with that of the model IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs to ensure compliance with this activity.**

## Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

### Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that students with disabilities are not consistently educated with their nondisabled peers. Although they reported that in-class support and opportunities for inclusion are available, they indicated that option needed to be increased at the elementary level. The district's improvement plan adequately addresses this area of need.

The district further identified that administrators and staff need to ensure that regular education with supplementary aids and services is the first option considered for students with educational disabilities. The district reported that this was not the philosophy held by all school personnel. The improvement plan does not include activities to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the decision-making process.

### Areas of Need:

**Regular education access with supplementary aids and services** – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that placement in a regular education classroom with supplementary aids and services is not the first option considered for students with disabilities. Parents expressed similar comments regarding the district's findings during the public focus group meeting and through interviews. They indicated that this lack of consideration of aides and services has limited the number of students with disabilities accessing regular education programs. Parents and staff also reported there was a lack of supplementary aids and services throughout the district that could be used to support students in regular education. Staff indicated that while some principals are most accommodating and supportive of students with disabilities, others would not provide necessary supports for these students. However, it was also reported that resistance from regular education teachers to accommodate students with disabilities has improved over the years.

**Documentation of the Decision-Making Process** – As reported, the district has changed its IEP format to reflect the statements and considerations contained in the state model IEP. The new model was implemented in May 2000.

A review of IEPs found that many contained boilerplate language and did not reflect the placement decision process. These statements appeared to justify a special class placement (in terms of the student's learning needs) as the first point of discussion. The IEPs did not indicate that any consideration was given to program modifications and supplementary aids and services for the regular class or an explanation of why these supports were not appropriate. All IEPs documented the benefits of special class placements.



During staff interviews, it was indicated that IEPs still did not allow team members to sufficiently document the decision-making process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated in general education settings with appropriate supplementary aids and services. The plan must also ensure documentation of the individualized decision-making process that includes the identification and consideration of supplementary aids and services. It is recommended that district staff attend the LRE Decision-Making technical assistance session provided by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

## **Section X: Transition**

### **A. Transition to Preschool**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately determined themselves to be compliant regarding participation at EIP transition planning conferences when they are invited. The district also noted that the case manager has established a sound working relationship with EIP staff. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site regarding documentation of this participation at EIP transition planning conferences.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Participation in the preschool transition planning conferences (EIP)** — A review of student records indicates that attendance at EIP transition planning conferences is not consistently documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure consistent documentation of attendance at EIP transition planning conferences.**

### **B. Transition from school to post-school**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP documentation of transition requirements, lack of involvement by guidance counselors, and a need to develop or purchase a career interest inventory for special education students. The district's improvement plan includes the hiring of a transition coordinator and staff development regarding technical assistance provided by OSEP. However, these activities will not sufficiently address the identified areas of need.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Components of transition in IEPs** – The district’s self-assessment identified a need to provide in-service training for elementary and middle school team members regarding the transition components in IEPs. The improvement plan does not include activities to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure elementary and middle school child study team members are provided with the information necessary to develop appropriate transition plans and to ensure staff members include required transition components in IEPs.**

**Career development/interest inventory** – The district’s self-assessment identified a need to develop or purchase a career development interest inventory to be used with middle school students to assess their preferences and interests. However, the improvement plan does not include any activities to address this need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the preferences and interests of students are appropriately identified and considered during transition planning activities.**

## **Section XI: Discipline**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding notification of case managers, conducting functional behavior assessments, developing behavior intervention plans, conducting manifestation determinations, parental due process rights, and the lack of an IAES. The district developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it identified staff meetings as the sole activity to bring about systemic change.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Notification of Case Manager** – The district indicated the need for building administrators to notify the case managers, in writing, of any disciplinary action being taken and the description of the reasons for the action.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district implements a district-wide tracking and notification system. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure building administrators are fully implementing these procedures.**

**FBA/BIPs** – The district indicated team members do not consistently conduct FBAs

and do not develop BIPs for those students who require these plans.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure FBAs are conducted to determine appropriate activities to address student behaviors. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the information obtained through the FBA is used to develop appropriate BIPs.**

**IEP/Manifestation Determination Meetings** – The district indicated it does not conduct meetings when a student is removed beyond ten days or within ten days of the removal to review and revise, as necessary, the student’s BIP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure manifestation determinations are conducted when a student’s removal constitutes a change in placement. The plan must also include procedures to ensure IEP team members review and revise, as appropriate, the student’s BIP within ten days of a removal.**

**IAES** – The district indicated the need to develop an IAES for students removed for serious offenses.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include the procedure it will follow to develop and implement a program(s) that complies with the requirements established for an IAES.**

## **Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need for in-service training of CST members regarding the content of statewide assessments and the process for participation of disabled students in statewide assessments including the assessment of students who are exempted and require an alternate assessment. The district also indicated a need to in-service staff on the process for participation in the Special Review Assessment. The district further identified a need for building administrators to participate in training activities regarding accommodations and modifications. The improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need. The plan needs to be revised to include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training sessions.

## **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified several areas of need

regarding the availability of in-class support, in-class replacement and supplemental instruction, and consultation time for resource program teachers and CST members. The improvement plan does not address these areas of need.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Increase the Availability of Program Options** – During self-assessment the district indicated a need to increase the availability of in-class support, in-class replacement and supplemental instruction.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it provides a full continuum of placement options to meet the identified needs of students.**

**Consultation Time** – During self-assessment, the district identified a need to provide consultation time for resource program teachers and for CST members to consult with classroom teachers and building administrators.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that resource room teachers and child study team members are provided time for consultation with appropriate general education staff.**

## **Section XV: Student Records**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district identified an area of need regarding maintenance and access to student records. The district also identified the need to more thoroughly review their current policies and procedures. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need. The plan must include a component to determine the effectiveness of the training.

## **Summary**

An on-site monitoring visit was conducted in Clifton during the week of January 8-12, 2001 after a public focus group meeting. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive

review it conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of the review, the district was able to self-identify the majority of areas that require improvement as well as develop a comprehensive improvement plan that with some revision should result in systemic change.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of related services; transfer students; timelines; age of majority; written notice; child find practices; referral practices; participants at meetings; health summaries; functional assessments; provision of copies of evaluation reports and IEPs; IEP components, considerations, and required statements; student involvement in the IEP process; regular education access and lack of a continuum of program options; individual decision-making regarding placement; discipline issues; and maintenance and access to student records.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards including extended school year considerations; facility concerns; communicating with parents whose native language is not English; bilingual evaluations; reevaluation of students turning age 5; IEP documentation of the decision making process; and district participation in EIP transition planning conferences.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to revise its improvement plan to address the additional areas of need and to resubmit the plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.