

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

District: Clinton School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: April 7-8, 2003

Monitoring Team: Barbara J. Tucker, Stephen Coplin, Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Kim Murray, Debbie Masarsky

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Clinton School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Clinton 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 Clinton 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 Josephine Mitchell School, on April 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/language therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their **School-wide Enrichment Model** – This program requires the enrichment teacher and the classroom teacher to work collaboratively to recognize and develop the talents of regular and special education students in and out of the classroom environment. Tiered assignments, flexible grouping, curriculum

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compacting and learning stations are utilized to expose all students to a wide variety of disciplines, topics, ideas, concepts, issues and events that may or may not be covered by the general curriculum. Additionally, students participate in advance level investigations centered around student identified real-life problems that may extend beyond school walls. These activities allow students to become firsthand inquirers and social activists. Finally, this model promotes the development of higher level critical and creative thinking skills by fostering participation in local, state, and national competitions that require the application of research skills and thinking processes.

The district is further commended for its successful efforts in educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Based on a review of district data, it was identified that more than 87% of their Autistic students, 81% of their Multiple Disabled students and nearly 98% of their Specific Learning Disabilities students are educated with general education students for part of the day or for the whole day.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the self-assessment process and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff development for grade level teachers, special education teachers and teaching assistants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section II: Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives for occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech, length of school day/year, transfer students and facilities.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, frequency, duration and location of programs and related services, individual/group related services, certification and goals/objectives for counseling.

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Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with instructional staff and record review that only students who have previously received extended school year are considered for continued services. In instances when extended school year continues to be provided, that section of the IEP is appropriately completed. However, when it is determined that individual students within this group no longer require an extended school year, that section of the IEP is not appropriately completed and may contain the statements “not applicable” or “will be discussed at a later date.”

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district considers and provides, when appropriate, extended school year for all students. When it is determined this program is not warranted, the IEP must include the factor(s) that were considered in that decision. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Frequency, Duration and Location of Programs and Related Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that frequency and duration are inappropriately documented in students' IEPs for programs and related services. IEPs indicated that duration and frequency of programs and related services were specified in ranges (e.g. 20-30 minutes, 2-3 times a week), rather than in specific numeric terms. In addition, IEPs did not consistently specify the location for the provision of related services (e.g. in or out of class).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that frequency and duration are specifically stated in specific numeric terms. In addition, the improvement plan must include a procedure to ensure that the specific location of the provision of related services is documented in the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Individual/Group Related Services- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that IEPs do not accurately specify whether the student will receive the related service individually or in a small group setting. Though some IEPs indicated the need for individual services, the students were receiving them in groups.

- **The district will immediately implement the IEPs as written. The district will also revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides services in the future as required by the IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Certification- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that instructional aides are providing services in in-class support programs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that in-class support instruction is only provided by appropriately certified teachers of the**

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handicapped. In the event some students do not require the services of a teacher, the IEPs must be revised and written notice provided to indicate supplementary aids and services are going to be provided in the general education setting. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Goals/Objectives for Counseling- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that the district does not consistently include counseling goals and objectives in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district consistently develops goals and objectives for counseling and include these in IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, notices in native language, provision of written notice, all areas of consent and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementing without undo delay, the action for which consent was granted and content of written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding content of notice of a meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Content of Notice of Meeting- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that the district's notice of a meeting does not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise its notice of a meeting to include all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice forms developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from

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parents/staff, vision and hearing screenings for school-aged students, and identification meetings timelines/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 20-day response to written parental requests, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for preschoolers, and health/medical information for school age students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the monitoring visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement activities to bring about correction in the areas regarding health summary, and vision and hearing screenings for preschoolers.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the district conducts child find activities for students three to twenty-one who are potentially disabled, the district's child find procedures do not include outreach activities to locate, identify and refer migrant and homeless students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child find activities are conducted to locate, identify and refer migrant and homeless students.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of signed/dated reports, multidisciplinary assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary assessments for students eligible for speech/language services and functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Acceptance/Rejection of Outside Reports- During the on-site monitoring child study team members stated that they review and consider outside evaluations/information provided by the parents in determining an appropriate program. However, at a focus group meeting parents maintained that child study team members do not consider the information provided to them. Based on a review of files, it was determined that the district does not document the acceptance or rejection of outside reports. As such, it could not be verified that these reports were in fact considered by the district.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district conducts a review of reports/information submitted by the parent and documents the acceptance/rejection of the entire report or assessment, or any part of the report or assessment. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings/participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of three-year timelines. The district's school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, criteria and documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of eligibility statements and evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 90-day timelines, documentation of copy of IEPs to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of required IEP statements/components. **The district's**

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improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because the improvement plan does not address how the district will ensure that parental concerns/input are documented in IEPs. The improvement plan will be revised to include this information.

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

***Section XIII:* Graduation Requirements are not applicable in this district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Clinton School District on April 7 and 8, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that 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, especially in the area of Least Restrictive Environment where more than 87% of their Autistic students, 81% of their Multiple Disabled students and nearly 98% of their Specific Learning Disabilities students are educated with general education students.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, some parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services, while others voiced concern regarding the provision of programs and services, certified staff, insufficient child study team members and related services personnel. Parents applauded the district's instructional staff and stated that the instructional staff were "phenomenal in their work" with students in that they are willing to make necessary changes/accommodations in the classroom. Parents overwhelmingly stated that although they are invited to attend meetings and provide the district with information which they feel will assist the district in developing an appropriate program for their child, they do not feel that the information, (i.e. outside evaluations), is being considered by the child study team members. Additionally, parents stated that they do not feel that they are considered an equal participant in the IEP/ decision-making process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment process, and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, goals and objectives for OT, PT speech, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, surrogate parents, notices in native language, all areas of consent, provision of written notice, interpreters at meetings, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/staff, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, timelines/participants, signed/dated reports, multidisciplinary assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings/participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a students' last year in preschool, meeting participants, criteria, signatures of agreement/disagreement, meeting participants, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding systemic staff development for grade level and special education teachers and teaching assistants, implementing without undo delay, the action for which consent was granted, content of written notice, 20-day calendar response to written parental requests, health summary, vision/hearing screenings for preschoolers, health/medical information for school age students, multidisciplinary assessments for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, three-year timelines, documentation of eligibility

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statements, evaluation reports to parents, documentation of eligibility statements, 90-day timeline, documentation of copy of IEPs to parents and required IEP statements/components in IEPs of students eligible for speech/language services or students eligible for special education and related services.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, frequency, duration and location of programs and related services, individual/group related services, certification, goals/objectives for counseling, content of notice of a meeting, child find activities and acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the 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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District Information

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