

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Closter School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: June 15 & 16, 2006

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten, Jenifer Spear & Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Closter School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Closter 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 Closter 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicated that the district's classification rate for the 2004-2005 school year was 13.39% which was below the state average of 14.6% for that year. With regard to placement, during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 50.3% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day as compared to the state average of 42% for that year. During the same school year, the district educated 100% of the students classified as preschool disabled in a combination of general and special education settings during the course of the day.

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Sections Demonstrating Compliance

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- Eligibility
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Transition to Preschool
- Statewide Assessments

Areas Not Reviewed

The following areas were not reviewed by the NJDOE during the on-site monitoring because the district does not serve a population of students for whom these regulations are required: beginning at age 16, IEP statement of “needed transition services” and written notice of graduation.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS).

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation • Extended school year • Provision of programs • Provision of related services
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent • Implementation without undue delay • Provision of notice of a meeting • Content of a notice of a meeting • Meetings • Provision of written notice • Content of written notice • Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find Ages 3-21 • Referral process • Direct referrals • Vision and hearing screenings • Identification meeting timelines • Identification meeting participants

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary evaluations • Standardized assessments • Functional assessments • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Implementation dates • IEP provided to parent prior to implementation • Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP • Annual reviews completed by June 30 • Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs) • 90-day timelines
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” • Identification of post-secondary liaison • Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension tracking system • Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students • IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days • Procedures for determination of change in placement • Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan • Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement • Short-term removals that are not a change in placement— school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided • Interim alternative educational settings • Manifestation determinations
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP requirements
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class size • Age range • Group size

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Areas of Noncompliance - Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an 'X' in the 'Needs Revision' column.

Section	Area	Compliance Review
Free, Appropriate Public Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transfer Procedures- The district does not have a procedure in place to expedite the implementation of the IEP of a transfer student. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notices in native language-Notices are not available in native languages. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interpreters at meetings-The district does not have a list of foreign language interpreters that would be available to translate. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Location, Referral and Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions- Teachers do not consistently provide interventions in the general education setting, nor do they document the interventions when they are implemented. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health summary-The school nurse does not consistently review and summarize health and medical information. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS)- Evaluation reports by the speech-language specialists do not consistently include an educational impact statement. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings-A letter of invitation to a transition meeting was not sent to students. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of removal forwarded to case manager- Case managers are not always notified of suspensions. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out-of-district participation- Parents/adult students are not notified of the option of getting a diploma from the district, or attending in-district graduation ceremonies. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.
Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common planning time- Resource program teachers do not have sufficient time for consultation with appropriate general education teaching staff. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an oversight mechanism to monitor ongoing compliance.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Closter School District on June 15 & 16, 2006. 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that resulted in the correction of noncompliance. The district is further acknowledged for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the OSEP as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicated that the district's classification rate for the 2004-2005 school year was 13.39% which was below the state average of 14.6% for that year. With regard to placement, during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 50.3% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day as compared to the state average of 42% for that year. During the same school year, the district educated 100% of the students classified as preschool disabled in a combination of general and special education settings during the course of the day.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, several parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- Eligibility
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Transition to Preschool
- Statewide Assessments

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit include:

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation
- Extended school year
- Provision of programs
- Provision of related services
- Consent
- Implementation without undue delay
- Provision of notice of a meeting
- Content of notice of a meeting
- Meetings
- Provision of written notice
- Content of written notice
- Independent evaluations
- Child Find Ages 3-21
- Referral process
- Direct referrals
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Identification meeting timelines
- Identification meeting participants
- Multi-disciplinary evaluations
- Standardized assessments
- Functional assessments
- Bilingual evaluations
- Written reports prepared by evaluators
- IEP meeting participants
- Implementation dates
- IEP provided to parent prior to implementation
- Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP
- Annual reviews completed by June 30

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- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
- 90-day timelines
- Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs”
- Identification of post-secondary liaison
- Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes
- Suspension tracking system
- Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students
- IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days
- Procedures for determination of change in placement
- Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan
- Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement
- Short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided
- Interim alternative educational settings
- Manifestation determinations
- IEP requirements for graduation
- Class size
- Age range
- Group size

During the self-assessment process, the district identified noncompliance regarding the areas listed below. It was determined during the on-site visit that all of the areas of need originally identified by the district as noncompliant were corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE. These areas include:

- Transfer procedures
- Notices in native language
- Interpreters at meetings
- Pre-referral interventions
- Health summary
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)
- IEP required components and considerations
- Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings
- Notification of removal/suspension forwarded to case manager
- Out-of-district participation in graduation
- Common planning time

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring onsite visit. The district demonstrated compliance in all areas reviewed as part of the monitoring process.