

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

District: Collingswood School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: October 27 and 28, 2003

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Michael Lee, and Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Collingswood School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Collingswood 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 Collingswood 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 Zane-North School on September 25, 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 the large number of innovative programs provided at various levels. There are several student recognition programs sponsored in cooperation with local businesses and mentoring programs such as Project Sharp, which allows older students to mentor younger students in an academic setting. School

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personnel report that these programs, as well as the numerous character education activities have resulted in a more inclusive atmosphere throughout the district. The district also offers a number of student support programs, including peer mediation, peer tutoring, and a natural helpers program, which establishes a network of students and school personnel to assist students with problems.

The district provides several programs designed to enhance classroom instruction. Both the after-school Language Arts/Literacy LAB and the summer enrichment program are open to students with disabilities.

The district operates the Interact Club, a Rotary-sponsored service club, which includes students with disabilities. This program of community service projects fosters the development of student leadership skills, assists students in demonstrating helpfulness and respect for others, and helps students to understand the value of individual responsibility and hard work.

The district operates the Power School Program, which allows parents to electronically access information regarding student performance. In addition, parents, teachers and child study team members are able to effectively communicate through e-mail. It is reported that this program has enhanced communication.

At the High School, students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in the Coin III program. This computer program assesses student career interests and aids in gathering information for use in planning transition to post-school activities.

The district operates the Collingswood Sunrise Program, which is a collaborative effort of the school district, local government, law enforcement, and community resources. This program offers parents and guardians therapeutic support and assistance in identifying and treating at-risk youth through community education programs and group and individual counseling. Portions of the program are funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Data Summary:

The data submitted by the Collingswood School District as a result of the self-assessment process has identified several areas of concern regarding placement in the least restrictive environment. However, it is noted that in response to these data, the district has taken steps to improve. Data indicated that placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is well below the state average. 86.9% of these students are placed in settings that do not offer access to general education. As a result of this identified need, the district has opened an inclusive preschool class at Zane-North Elementary School. This new program has accommodated four preschool disabled students and parents, staff, and administration have high praise for the program. District personnel are currently determining if there is a need to expand the program. During the 2002-2003 school year, 36% of classified students age 6-21 were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. This is below the state average of 41.6%. In addition, although the number of classified students placed in separate settings has decreased since the 2000-2001 school year by 2.6%, the district has identified a need for a greater continuum of in-district placement options, including more in-class support programs. The district has opened a program for students with behavior disabilities at the middle school level to allow for more in-district placement options.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Evaluation, 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 on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment 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 professional and parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 provision of related services, transfer procedures, provision of adaptive PE, oversight of IEP implementation, and certification of special education personnel.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of length of school day/year and facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns regarding maintenance of hearing aids. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that the new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, goals and objectives for counseling, and IEP documentation of location of related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that extended school year (ESY) is not considered for all students, specifically those at the middle and high school level.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities and training to ensure that ESY is considered for all students. The implementation of these activities and training will result in the provision of ESY services for all students who require them.**

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Goals and Objectives for Counseling – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs do not consistently contain goals and objectives for counseling as a related service.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs contain goals and objectives for counseling as a related service. The implementation of these activities will ensure that therapists have the necessary information regarding therapy needs and the benchmarks against which student progress can be measured. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

IEP Documentation of Location of Related Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs for middle and high school students do not identify the location of speech therapy or counseling services. IEPs do not indicate in-class or pull-out, but instead indicate “middle school” or “high school.”

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that student IEPs identify the location of related services. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed of the extent that students are removed from regular education. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, conducting required meetings, providing written notice in native language, and conducting independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for locating and training surrogate parents and provision of notice of a meeting. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of written notice of IEP revisions and notice of annual reviews within required timelines. **The district did not submit improvement plan activities to address these areas. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.** The district also identified concerns regarding documentation of attempts to secure parent participation at meetings and teacher participation at meetings. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. In addition, although the plan addresses teacher participation, the activities do not specifically address meetings held for preschool referrals or meetings conducted during the summer months which were found to be non-compliant during the on-site visit. Additional activities must be developed to address these types of meetings.**

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for making direct referrals and summer referrals, and timelines for conducting identification meetings for initial referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documenting the effectiveness of interventions implemented prior to referral and providing health summaries and vision/hearing screenings prior to the evaluation planning meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find for school-aged students.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find for School-aged Students – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not have procedures in place to inform parents of school-aged students of the process for accessing child study team services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure Child Find activities are conducted for school-aged students. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed of the process for making a referral to the child study team.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting reevaluation planning meetings for students classified as eligible for special education and related services and reevaluations for classified students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of conducting reevaluations within the three-year timeline. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for conducting reevaluations prior to declassification for students eligible for speech-language services.

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Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluation for Students Prior to Declassification from Speech – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently conduct a reevaluation for students classified as eligible for speech-language services prior to declassifying that student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a reevaluation is conducted when considering a change in eligibility for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The implementation of these activities will ensure determinations are based on existing data or new assessments and that these determinations are made by an appropriately configured IEP team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility criteria for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, and provision of notice of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns in the areas of teacher participation at eligibility meetings, provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, and determination of eligibility for speech-language students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP components, IEP goals and objectives, IEP implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for revising IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding procedures for informing teachers of their responsibility for implementing IEPs, and provision of copies of IEPs to parents when consent has been given to implement sooner than 15 days. **The district's**

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improvement is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of the Oberti considerations and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of individualized decision-making, including the need for a greater continuum of options for preschool students and students with behavior concerns, and a need for more support options in regular education. The district identified a need for additional staff development as a barrier to compliance for both preschool and school-age programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. On-site monitoring determined that the district has begun to bring about correction in this area through the implementation of an inclusive preschool program and a middle school self-contained program for students with behavior disabilities, as well as provision of ongoing staff development opportunities.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding access to regular education programs.

Area(s) of Need:

Access to Regular Education Programs – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that district policy does not permit students placed in out-of-district placements to access the Latchkey program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students in out-of-district programs have access to the Latchkey program. The implementation of these activities will ensure that students are not denied access to regular education programs based solely on their disability and placement.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency involvements and IEP statements of transition services needs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of identification of the post-secondary liaison, individualization of statements of needed transition services, and a need for expanded vocational/job training programs. **The**

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district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding student participation at transition planning meetings and procedures for identifying student interests and preferences when students are not in attendance at the IEP meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Student Participation – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that students are not consistently invited to IEP meetings when transition planning is discussed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students are invited to IEP meetings when the purpose includes transition planning. The implementation of these activities will ensure that students are involved in developing meaningful transition plans. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Preferences and Interests – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that there are no procedures in place to consistently identify student interests and preferences when the student does not attend the IEP meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure information regarding student interests and preferences is obtained and considered when the student is not in attendance at the IEP meeting. The implementation of this procedure will ensure that the IEP team has the necessary information to develop meaningful transition plans if the student is unable to attend the IEP meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of attendance at preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs for preschoolers by their third birthday.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, development of behavior intervention plans, conducting

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functional behavior assessments and manifestation determinations, and procedures for placing students in interim alternative education settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of numbers of suspensions of classified pupils. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding notification to case managers when pupils are suspended, implementation of a suspension tracking system, and consultation on the extent of services for students when short-term removals are not considered a change in placement. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that new procedures are implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification of students who are potentially disabled.

Area(s) of Need:

Identification of Potentially Disabled Students – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that administrative personnel responsible for discipline at the middle school level are unaware of the code requirements regarding safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled. As a result, these students do not receive services when they are removed beyond ten days.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures and training to ensure that middle school administrators responsible for discipline are aware of the safeguards that are to be afforded to students identified as potentially disabled. The implementation of these procedures and training will ensure that any student for whom the district has a basis of knowledge is provided with educational services on the 11th day of removal from school.**

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in statewide assessments, provision of approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, and provision of alternate assessments when required.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student participation in the SRA process and a need to increase proficiency for students taking the GEPA (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size and age range, and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of homebound instruction in a timely manner and provision of consultation time for resource teachers. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Collingswood School District on October 27 and 28, 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 many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. In addition, the district offers a substantial number of unique and innovative programs designed to support teacher instruction, enhance student achievement, and foster an inclusive atmosphere.

A review of data indicated several areas of concern regarding placement in the least restrictive environment. Data submitted by the district indicated that placement of students in general education settings is below the state average. The district identified a need for a greater continuum of options for both preschool and school-aged students. As a result of the self-assessment process, the district has established new programs to enable more students to be served in-district. In addition, the improvement plan addresses the need for more programs within the regular education environment.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Twenty parents attended this meeting along with several staff members and administrators. Many of the parents expressed satisfaction with the programs and services, especially the inclusive preschool program, and praised the district's efforts to improve and expand special education services. Some concerns were expressed by parents regarding teacher knowledge of IEPs, access to regular education programs for students placed out-of-district, a need for more in-class support opportunities, and a need for more parent workshops. The majority of the issues brought up by parents were identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, transfer procedures, certification, consent, native language, independent evaluations, referral procedures, evaluations, eligibility determination for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, IEP development, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews and initial evaluations, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition, participation in statewide assessments, graduation, provision of programs and services, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, length of school day/year, facilities, procedures for maintaining hearing aids, surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, written notice, documentation of attempts to secure parent participation, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, reevaluation timelines, teacher participation at meetings, provision of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility determination for speech-only students, IEP revisions, provision of IEPs to parents sooner than 15 days, individualized decision-making, continuum of options for preschool

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and school-age students, identification of post-secondary liaison for transition, statements of needed transition services, expanded vocational/job training programs, suspension rates for classified students, procedures for tracking suspensions and notifying case managers, extent of services for short-term removals, participation in the SRA process, proficiency rates for students taking the GEPA, homebound instruction, and consultation time for resource teachers.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, goals and objectives for counseling, Child Find for school-aged students, procedures for conducting speech reevaluations, access to regular education programs, student participation at transition meetings, identification of student preferences and interests, and safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled.

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