

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

District: Cranford Public School District

County: Union

Monitoring Dates: May 13, 2004

Monitoring Team: Barbara J. Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Cranford Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Cranford 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 Cranford Public School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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 Lincoln School, on May 4, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring activities. Additionally, 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 administrator and child study team members. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, warranting only minor revisions which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for **PASE**, Parents Advocating for Special Education, an organized group of parents of special education students. The mission of **PASE** is to educate, advocate and provide mutual support for parents of students with disabilities. The group meets monthly and regularly provides presentations by guest speakers on topics that pertain to the needs of the student population. The meetings are regularly attended by the Director of Special Services and the Supervisor of Special Education, to allow parents an opportunity to address concerns and questions.

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The district is also commended for **Career Pathways**, a specialized program designed to help students to be better prepared to live and work in the twenty-first century. The **ACE Program** provides students who are not successful in the traditional academic programs with an opportunity to achieve. Both programs are guided by a highly trained faculty and supported by counseling. Students learn to develop skills, increase self-esteem and enlarge their marketable capabilities through participation in carefully structured activities.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Discipline, Statewide Assessments, Graduation Requirements 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.

Part One Data Summary:

The Cranford School District educated 62.5% of their special needs students with their non-disabled peers in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day. This is significantly higher than the state's average. The district is further commended for developing an improvement plan which continues this positive trend through provision of staff training that will assist them in documenting the interventions which are used in general education classes prior to referring a student to the child study team. A review of data for the past three years also indicates that there has been a significant increase in the number of disabled students who have graduated. Additionally, the district has seen a decrease in the number of disabled students in the district between the ages 16-21 who have dropped out of school.

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 programs, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, availability of related services and transfer students. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, independent evaluations, 20-day timelines and provision of procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation of actions for which consent was obtained, written notices content/provision and interpreters at meetings. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and identification meeting timelines/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary and vision/hearing screenings. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports and nature and scope.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of speech/language multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments and speech/language written reports. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, meeting participants and reevaluation completed by June 30th of their last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of 3-year timelines. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for severe learning discrepancy and signatures of agreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of evaluation reports to parents 10-days prior to an IEP meeting. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of consideration of supplementary aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participation of vocational personnel in IEP meetings. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access for school-aged students, notification/participation to out-of-district students regarding extra-curricular and/or non-academic programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the consideration of supplementary aids and services, decision-making process, extra-curricular activities for students in out-of-district placements, modifications and accommodations for students to progress in regular education and placement with supplementary aids and services for preschool handicapped students. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preferences/interests, Statement of Needed Transition Services and student invitation to IEP meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Statement of Transition Service Needs and consent for individualized assessments. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of staff attendance at preschool planning conferences and early intervention programs to preschool program by age three.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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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 waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech and home instruction

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and sufficient staff. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring activities were conducted in the Cranford Public School District on May 13, 2004. 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 Cranford School District is highly commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic changes. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs through a desk audit, a focus group meeting and parent interviews.

Additionally, General Provisions, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Graduation 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.

District data indicate the continues its positive trends in increasing the number of special needs students who are being educated with their non-disabled peers in general education settings. Data further indicate a decrease in the number of students who drop out of school, and an increase in the number of disabled students who graduate from the district each year.

During the course of an emotional focus group held on May 4, 2004 and attended by over 50 parents, teachers, administrators and child study team members, parents praised the district for: communication between staff and themselves, the quality of programs and services provided by the district and the sensitivity of team members in understanding both parent and student needs. Several parents expressed their gratitude to district personnel as they reflected on the progress their children had made and the very positive experiences they had when working with district staff. One parent said "the staff are my angels, because they are sensitive and supportive." Some parents of autistic students praised the "terrific communications" between themselves and district staff, and the fact that their children are being challenged through innovative instruction and programs. Parents also praised the district for resolving parental issues and concerns in a timely manner. Yet, there were also parents who raised concerns about issues such as teachers who do not implement students' IEPs; missing basic supports for students in ICS classes and the district's alleged inability to adhere to important timelines. Many parents who could not attend the meeting, submitted written comments to document their concerns which touched upon such issues as, not receiving feedback regarding their child's progress, preparation for post-secondary education/world of work and the need for more teacher training.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of programs, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, independent evaluations, 20-day calendar timelines, provision of procedural safeguards, child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines/participants, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, nature and scope, planning meetings, meeting participants, reevaluation completed by June 30th of a students' last year in preschool, eligibility/meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for severe learning discrepancy, signatures of agreement, access to regular education, notification to out-of-district students regarding extra-curricular activities,

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continuum of programs, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access for school-aged students, notification/participation to out-of-district students regarding extra-curricular and/or non-academic programs, preferences/interests, Statement of Needed Transition Services, student invitation to IEP meeting, staff attendance at preschool planning conferences, early intervention programs to preschool program by age three, class size waivers, age-range waivers, group sizes for speech and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, availability of related services and transfer students, consent for implementation of the action for which consent was obtained, IEP, written notices content/provision, interpreters at meetings, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, speech/language multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments, speech/language written reports, of 3-year timelines, evaluation reports to parents within 10-days, participation of vocational personnel in IEP meetings, consideration of supplementary aids and services, the decision-making process, extra-curricular activities for students in out-of-district placements, modifications/ accommodations for students to progress in regular education, placement with supplementary aids and services for preschool handicapped students, Statement of Transition Service Needs, consent for individualized assessments, consultation time for staff and sufficient staff.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.