

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Delran Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: December 9, 10, 11 & 12, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Jane Marano and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Delran Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Delran Township 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 Delran Township 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 Delran High School on November 12, 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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the number and variety of academic assistance programs that offer support to all students. The Reading and Math Buddies programs offered at the kindergarten through second grade levels utilize volunteers to build and reinforce reading and math skills. At the middle school, special education teachers provide

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additional academic support during the Breakfast Club and the after school Homework Club.

The district also provides assistance in the area of social and emotional growth. *BABES* is a drug and alcohol prevention program designed for students to learn and practice positive living skills, healthy attitudes and behaviors. Topics include self image, peer pressure, decision- making and coping skills.

The district is also commended for the business partnership recently established with Lockheed Martin. Volunteers provide assistance with reading instruction at the elementary level. At the secondary level, the Junior Achievement Volunteer Program with Lockheed Martin provides students with support in “career” classes with real life economics and business training that promotes active learning and brings theory to real life.

Part One Data Summary:

The district’s data indicate an increase in the percentage of students with disabilities who receive instruction in general education. Over a three year period, the percent of students educated less than 40% of the time with general education students has decreased while the percent of time students with disabilities are educated with general education students has increased. The district has increased the number of special education staff to accommodate additional students in regular education classes primarily through in-class support. The district has included 100% of students eligible for special education and related services in statewide assessments.

While the district currently does not operate an integrated preschool program, the district has made a concerted effort to place preschool disabled students in community preschools and integrated programs rather than self-contained classes. District data indicate that 70% of preschool disabled students attend programs in general education early childhood settings. The district plans to open an integrated preschool program in September 2004.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Procedural Safeguards, Eligibility and Statewide Assessment 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, procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development for teaching staff and para-professionals and training opportunities for parents and families. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of transfer students. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of related service because the self-assessment identified funding as the barrier to the provision of services and the improvement plan is contingent upon budget approval. The plan needs to be revised to include activities to ensure the provision of related services in the event the budget is not passed.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

Area of Need:

Extended School Year – Information obtained through record review determined that IEPs for students classified eligible for special education and related services do not consistently describe the extended school year program nor does it include goals and objectives. Furthermore, for students classified eligible for speech and language services, extended school year is not considered.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure extended school year is considered for all classified students including those eligible for speech and language services and that all required components are included in IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure each student who requires services to address issues of regression and recoupment receives those services.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, referral process, prereferral interventions, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of child find activities, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, referral process and

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pre referral interventions. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations and documentation of acceptance/ rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments.

Area of Need:

Functional Assessments - Information obtained through record review determined that functional assessments do not consistently contain all required components. Teacher and parent interviews and review of interventions are not consistently documented in reports for students evaluated for special education and related services. Teacher and parent interviews and documentation of educational impact are not consistently documented in reports for students evaluated for eligibility for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise it's improvement plan to include activities to ensure functional assessments contain all required components. Implementation of these activities will ensure reports contain sufficient information upon which eligibility determinations can be made.**

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three year timelines, planning meetings, participants for students eligible for special education and related services and reevaluations completed by June 30th of the students last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of three year timelines for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, Present Levels of Educational Performance statements, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines, and required statements and considerations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of teacher access and knowledge and reconvening an IEP meeting to amend an IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of teacher access and knowledge. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of reconvening an IEP meeting to make changes to the IEP because it does not include sufficient activities to correct this area. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP meeting participants.

Area of Need:

IEP meeting participants – Information obtained through interviews and record review determined that students age 14 do not consistently attend IEP meetings during which time transition service needs are developed.

- **The district will revise it's improvement plan to include activities to ensure that beginning at age 14, students are invited to and attend IEP meetings where transition is discussed. Implementation of these activities will ensure a plan is developed that appropriately reflects the students interests and preferences and address the individual needs of that students to ensure a relationship between the plan and post-secondary outcomes. The plan must include**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consideration of supplemental aids and services and notification and participation of students placed in out-of-district programs in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool individual decision-making, continuum and regular education access because the district does not currently have an in-district preschool disabled program. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

The district identified concerns in the areas of school age least restrictive environment documentation, regular education access, continuum and individual decision-making.

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Barriers identified by the district include resistance on the part of some regular education teachers because they feel they are ill equipped to deal with children with special education needs. Some teachers also believe that special education students are better served when they are educated separately. Other identified barriers include parental preference for placement in out-of-district programs, available financial resources, additional staff to provide more in-class support, boiler plate language and a misunderstanding of required considerations when documenting individual decision-making. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen statement of transition service needs and age sixteen needed transition services and community based agency involvement. 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of early intervention program to preschool by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination meeting, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager and suspension tracking. 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 XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and written notice of graduation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation of students placed out-of-district in district activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time, insufficient staff (counselors, occupational therapist and remedial reading specialists) and obtaining substitutes. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of obtaining substitutes and consultation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of staffing needs. The district identified budget limitations as a potential barrier to employing additional staff. The district's plan indicates additional staff will be employed to meet the needs identified in the self-assessment. However, the plan needs to be revised to identify alternative activities in the event the budget is defeated.**

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access and documentation of location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parental consent to destroy student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area

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 Delran School District on December 9, 10, 11 & 12, 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.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in general education programs. The district reported 100% participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments. The district identified the need to develop an integrated preschool program within the district and has addressed this need in their improvement plan.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents indicated that the district explores interventions in general education to avoid unnecessary classifications. Parents stated that staff have a strong commitment to the students. Input from therapists employed outside the district was recognized by the district. Parent input is welcomed by district staff. The majority of parents whose children require specialized equipment indicated the district has always provided the equipment. Parents expressed concern in the areas of exploration of career awareness programs and the need for on-going staff development. Communication with the case manager is generally good but is sometimes difficult during specific times of the year. Some parents stated that the IEPs challenged their children while others thought the IEPs were not challenging enough. Parents stated that budget restrictions may limit services and programs.

Areas demonstrating compliance with all standards included procedural Safeguards, Eligibility and Statewide Assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies, procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, meetings, consent, notice of meetings, meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals, identification meetings timelines and participants, summer referrals, multi disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, three year timelines, planning meetings and participants for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluations by June 30th, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement/disagreement, IEP meetings, goals and objectives/core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, present level of educational performance, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, consideration of supplemental aides and services, notification and participation of students placed in out of district programs in non academic and extra curricular activities, required statements and considerations, early intervention program to preschool by age three, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination meetings, procedural

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safeguards, interim alternative educational settings, IEP graduation requirements, written notice of graduation, class size, age range, group size for speech, home instruction, student record access and documentation of location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development for teaching staff and para-professionals and training opportunities for parents and families, provision of related services and transfer students, child find activities, referral process, pre referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, three year timelines for students eligible for speech and language services, teacher access and knowledge, reconvening IEP meetings, preschool decision-making, continuum and regular education access, least restrictive language documentation, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, community based involvement, preschool transition planning conference, suspension documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, graduation participation by students placed in out-of-district programs, consultation time, insufficient staff and parental consent to destroy student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, functional assessments and IEP meeting participants.

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