

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

District: Dennis Township School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: February 19, 20 and 24, 2003

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano and Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001 – 2002 school year, the Dennis 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 Dennis 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 Dennis 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 Middle School on February 11, 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, speech therapists and child study team members. Parents were interviewed by telephone.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for implementing a math program – Everyday Math - that focuses on real world problems, applications, and differentiated and collaborative learning for all students in grades K-4.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Special education teachers use Orton-Gillingham techniques to reinforce reading development. In 2002, 79% of all students (includes all in-district students with disabilities) scored in the proficient or above range on the New Jersey Department of Education Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA)/Language Arts section.

Students can remain after school to do homework and projects under a teacher's guidance in the "Homework Club." The district operates a late bus to transport students home.

A model inclusion program was created several years ago in collaboration with Cape May Special Services School District. In this program, Dennis Township Elementary School is the host school for an auditory impaired elementary class from Cape May Special Services School District. Students receive in-class support, interpreter services and pull-out resource instruction.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Statewide Assessment was determined to be an area 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 area of staff development and parent training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 length of school day/year, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the related service of counseling, only. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address the provision of related services and the provision of physical education/adaptive physical education because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

elements. The district further identified concerns in the areas of transfer procedures, oversight of IEP implementation, and facilities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** 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 and goals/objectives for related services.

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that although the consideration of extended school year is documented in IEPs, when extended school year is provided, the IEP does not contain a description of the extended school year program, goals and objectives and duration of services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year program is described in the IEP, the duration of the program is included in the IEP, and goals and objectives are included for all areas that will be addressed during the extended school year program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Goals/Objectives for Related Services - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that goals and objectives for related services (speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, etc) are not consistently developed and included in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure goals/objectives for related services are developed and included in IEPs. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notice of transition meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of meeting timelines and meeting participants. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district also identified concerns in the area of the provision of notices in native language. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of written notice.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice - During the on-site visit, interviews with staff and a review of records indicated that the district does not consistently provide written notice following an identification meeting when it is determined that an evaluation is not warranted and following the eligibility meeting when it is determined that the student is not eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides written notice following a meeting where specific actions are being proposed or denied.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participants at identification meeting held in the summer. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral/referral process, and summer referrals. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district also identified concerns in the area of health summaries and vision/hearing screenings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff members and a review of student records indicated that regular education teachers do not consistently participate in meetings for students who are eligible for special education and related services and for students who are eligible for speech and language services. Additionally, the full child study team is not consistently in attendance for identification meetings and special education teachers are not consistently in attendance at initial IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the required participants are in attendance at all required**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

meetings. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, components of functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of standardized assessments. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding evaluations for children ages 3-5.

Area of Need:

Preschool Evaluations – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that evaluations for children ages 3-5 are not conducted by at least two members of the child study team. The district routinely conducts a social history assessment and counts the speech assessment as the second CST assessment. Only an assessment by the psychologist or learning consultant may serve as the second required assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that preschool evaluations are conducted by at least two members of the child study team. Should a speech assessment be required, it is in addition to the other two assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation notices, parental consent and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and planning meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of eligibility meetings and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of eligibility criteria (for specific learning disability and communication impaired). **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district also identified concerns in the area of the provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to an eligibility meeting. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 area of the provision of IEPs, implementation dates, and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP components, IEP goals and objectives, annual review timelines, procedures for revising IEPs, 90-day timelines, and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** 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 the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum of services. The district identified barriers to providing services in the least

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

restrictive environment as space limitations, insufficient staff, lack of supplemental aids and services and the lack of program options for preschool students in the community. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns regarding individualized decision-making, Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services and the impact that has on access to regular education programs, and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of in-class support programs.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Programs – During the on-site monitoring, record review, staff interviews, and a review of teacher schedules indicated that the district's in-class support resource program for science and social studies is being implemented by teaching assistants and not by a certified special education teacher.

- **The district will immediately cease to use teaching assistants in those classes where a teacher of the handicapped is required. The district must further ensure those classes are immediately staffed with appropriately certified staff. Additionally, the district must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that in the future, special education teachers implement all in-class support resource programs. In the event the IEP team determines a student requires only a teaching assistant, the IEP must indicate that assistant is being provided as a supplemental aid or service, not as the provider of in-class support services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invitations, agency involvements, and statement of transition services needs (age 14). **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of implementation of IEPs by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of preschool transition planning conferences. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of discipline procedures, notification of removals to case managers, suspension tracking, development of behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determinations, and procedures for placement in interim alternative education settings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class descriptions, case management, and common planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding class size and lack of personnel (district has not been able to hire a learning-disabilities teacher consultant). **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of class size because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 parent/adult student access to records, and procedures for destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets, procedures for maintenance of records, and documentation of locations of pupil records. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Dennis Township School District on February 19, 20 and 24, 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with the new inclusion classes, teacher availability, and use of classroom assistants. Parents expressed concerns with the availability of the director, child study team members, and speech therapists and with the lack of communication with the child study team. Parents also expressed concerns with the lack of program options for preschool students with disabilities and individual decision-making regarding placement options.

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, length of school day/year, certification, consent, meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals, reevaluation for preschool, special education students turning age 5, eligibility meetings, documentation of eligibility, provision of IEP, age of majority, implementation of IEP by age three, statewide assessments, IEP graduation requirements, procedures for destruction of pupil records, and access to records by parents/adult students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, provision of related services, transfer procedures, facilities, surrogate parents, notice of transition meetings, notices in native language, Child Find, pre-referral/referral procedures, identification meeting timelines and participants, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, health summary, standardized assessments, reevaluation timelines and planning meetings, eligibility criteria for specific learning disability and communication impaired, documentation of eligibility when determined not eligible, documentation of agreement/disagreement of eligibility and rationale, provision of evaluation reports 10 days prior to meeting, IEP development, IEP documentation, IEP components, IEP revisions, timelines for annual reviews, 90 days timelines, teacher having access to IEPs/knowledge of IEPs, least restrictive environment, individualized decision-making, access to regular education, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of services, transition from school to post-school (age 14), discipline, participation in graduation for out of district students, provision of programs and services, common planning time, child study team case management, insufficient personnel, procedures for maintenance of pupil records, and documentation of other location of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, provision of written notice, meeting participants, preschool evaluations, and provision of in-class support programs.

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

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