

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

District: Denville School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: June 7, 2005

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2003 – 2004 school year, the **Denville School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Denville School District with an opportunity to evaluate strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Denville School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring visit 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 Lakeview School on May 19, 2005. 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. A representative sample of student records was reviewed and interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators and parents.

Data Summary:

A review of district special education data indicated that more than 50% of the district's students with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers for more than 80% of the school day. This percentage exceeds the state average of 41.6%.

The district reported a classification rate of 12.9% for students eligible for special education and related services during the 2003-2004 school year. This is lower than the state average for that year.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements and Programs and Services 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 compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, provision of related services including speech, counseling, occupational therapy and physical therapy, length of day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and IEP implementation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training 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 III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Notices – During the on-site monitoring visit, record review indicated that parents are not consistently provided with notice of meetings nor are they provided with written notice within the required timelines for students determined eligible for special education and related services and for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of meetings and written notice are provided to parents. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process regarding the provision of programs and services as well as have the opportunity to dispute any proposed or denied action.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of child find, referral process and direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of pre-referral interventions. **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.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines and participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Health Summaries and Hearing and Vision Screenings – During the on-site monitoring visit, record review indicated that health summaries and results of hearing and vision screenings are not provided to the child study team prior to identification meetings for preschoolers and students referred for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities and training to ensure that health summaries and the results of hearing and vision screenings, are provided to child study teams for the identification meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that health information is available when considering the need for an evaluation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Identification Meeting Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that identification meetings are not consistently convened within 20 days of the receipt of the referral for preschool aged students or students referred for speech and language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the identification meetings are held within the 20-day timeline as required by N.J.A.C. 6 A:14-3.3(e). These activities must include date stamping the referral the day it is received by the district. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure continued adherence to timelines.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through document review that required participants were not in attendance for preschool meetings or meetings for students referred for speech and language services. Attendance of general education teachers was inconsistent.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all required participants attend meetings and that their participation is documented. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these procedures. These activities, in addition to procedures for provision of notices, will ensure that all required participants will have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, signed and dated written reports and bilingual evaluations.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessment – During the on-site monitoring it was determined, through document review, that evaluations for the preschool aged students do not include all of the necessary components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluations conducted by the child study team include the components necessary to constitute a functional assessment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on a variety of assessments.**

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of conducting meetings and required participants, statements of eligibility and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of eligibility criteria and providing evaluation reports to parents and adult students ten days prior to eligibility 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.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of teacher access to and responsibility for implementing IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding continuum of programs in the area of general education access for preschoolers. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks activities 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 was identified during the on-site visit regarding least restrictive environment documentation and notification of students educated outside of the district of extracurricular activities and participation.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Least Restrictive Environment – During the on-site monitoring, documentation review and interviews indicated that although IEP teams may discuss

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placement in general education, the district does not consistently document in the IEP all four statements required when considering the least restrict environment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications, the explanation of why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate and documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. Implementation of these activities will ensure that appropriate considerations are discussed and placement decisions are based on the needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent compliant implementation of the activities.**

Notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities - During the on-site monitoring, record review and parent interviews indicated that students who are placed out-of-district are not afforded opportunities to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities for students who are placed out of district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of access and requests of student records. 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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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Denville Township School District on June 7, 2005. 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that 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 district special education data indicates that 50% of students with disabilities are educated in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. The district also reported a classification rate of 12.9%, which is lower than the state average of 14.3 %.

At a focus group meeting held during the onsite monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many parents also expressed satisfaction with accessibility to current administration.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, identification timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, 3 year timelines, planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility SLD, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of education performance, goals and objectives aligned to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, IEP documentation, IEP requirements at age 14, age range waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, extended school year, provision of related services, surrogate parents, notices in native language, pre-referral interventions, health summary, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to meeting, class size waivers and access and requests.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding health summaries and vision and hearing screenings, provision of notices,

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identification meetings, functional assessment for preschoolers, documentation of decisions regarding the least restrictive environment, and notification of and participation in extracurricular activities for students educated out-of-district.

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