

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

District: East Amwell **Monitoring Dates:** September 18-19, 2000

Monitoring Team: Stephen A. Coplin, Debbie Masarsky, Barbara J. Tucker

Background Information:

On December 8, 1999, the parents and staff of the East Amwell School District were invited to attend a focus group public meeting as the first step in the self assessment process. The self assessment included the collection of data and information from various sources within the district to determine if the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements.

A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self assessment. Based on the information collected by the district, a self assessment document was developed citing strengths and areas of need. The report of findings also contained activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified by the district as areas of need.

A second focus group public meeting was held in the district on September 12, 2000 prior to the monitoring visit. This focus group, which included parents and district representatives, was facilitated by the New Jersey State Department of Education. At this meeting, the parents reported that they were very pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services.

District Strengths:

The district provides an after school tutoring program for classified students. This program is offered one hour a day for four days a week and is staffed by both regular and special education teachers.

Area Demonstrating Compliance:

Transition 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:

The district board of education ensures that it provides publicly funded educational programs and services to students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state regulations. The district recently revised their policies to reflect changes since the adoption of N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The district is currently in the process of revising its

procedures. These procedures will be forwarded to the county office for review and approval.

The district makes available to parents of students with disabilities and to the general public all documents relating to the eligibility of the district under Part B of the IDEA.

However, the district identified staff development as an area of need in the self-assessment document.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Development- The self-assessment document indicated the need for participation by regular and special education teachers in training sessions related to the core curriculum content standards and the use of behavioral interventions. In addition, special education teachers need to participate in training sessions related to transition practices.

- The district has accurately identified staff development as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

The district provides free, appropriate special education and related services to students with disabilities age 3-1. These services are provided at public expense, under public supervision, and with no charge to the parent, and are located in facilities that are accessible to the disabled. The length of the school day and the academic year for students with disabilities is at least as long as that established for non-disabled students. Physical education (regular, modified, or adapted) is provided for students with disabilities, including those students in separate facilities. The district ensures that an extended school year is considered and discussed for all classified students.

The district identified procedures relating to transfer students as an area of need in the self-assessment document. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the development of counseling goals and objectives.

Area (s)of Need:

Transfer Students-The self assessment document indicated that the district needs to be more consistent with timely reviews of transfer students' IEPs.

- The district has accurately identified that the timely review of IEPs for transfer students is an area of need and has developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

Counseling Goals and Objectives-A review of records and staff interviews indicated that IEPs for classified students receiving counseling as a related service did not include counseling goals and objectives.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that goals and objectives for classified students receiving counseling as a related service are developed and documented in IEPs.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

The district has policies and procedures in effort to ensure that students with disabilities and their parents are afforded procedural safeguards. The district obtains consent prior to conducting any initial evaluation, implementing the initial IEP, conducting any reevaluation, and releasing student records. In addition, the district implements without undue delay, the action for which consent was granted. The district has developed a list of adults who are willing to serve as surrogate parents.

Record reviews and interviews with parents and staff indicated that all timelines relating to initial evaluations, annual reviews, and reevaluations are being met according to code. Record review also indicated that prior written notice is provided within timelines and contains all components according to code. Additionally, all appropriate participants are in attendance at required meetings.

The district identified translation resources as an area of need in its self-assessment document. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding a missing component in the notice of a meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Notices component – Although record review indicated that the notice of an Identification Meeting contained the required components, all subsequent meeting notices were missing the component which provides both the parents and/or the district the option to include as participants:

- "...other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding this student, including related services personnel. "
- The district will develop an improvement plan to revise its notice of a meeting. The district is encouraged to use the letters developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Translation Resources-Although staff interviews indicated that the district currently has no students or parents of students who speak a language other than English, the self assessment document indicated the district needs to develop translation resources.

- The district has identified translation resources as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan to address this area of need.

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification:

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education has written procedures to locate, refer and evaluate students. Pre-referral interventions in general education programs as well as implementation of these interventions were documented in the files reviewed for purposes of this monitoring. Timelines for initial referrals were compliant. When an evaluation is warranted, the district does immediately secure parental consent for the evaluation as verified through parent and staff interviews and the evaluation plan form. In addition, within 15 days of conducting the evaluation plan meeting the school district provides parents with the written notice of the determination to evaluate. Procedures provide for referral by instructional, administrative and other professional staff of the district, parents and agencies concerned with the welfare of students.

The district identified Child Find activities as an area of need in the self-assessment document. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of vision and hearing screenings.

Area(s) of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screening documentation-The results of the vision and hearing screenings for students are documented in the PLEP. However, for those students found not eligible for special education programs and services, the results of these screenings are not documented.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that documentation of the results of the vision and hearing screening for all students referred to the child study team is maintained in the student record.

Child Find activities for migrant and homeless children-The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to include migrant and homeless children in their child find outreach activities, as well as a need to reach a wider segment of the community served by the district.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address how they will include migrant and homeless children in their Child Find outreach activities. However, the district must revise its plan to include a component to demonstrate how they will document their efforts to broaden the scope of disseminating this information, and by what date the district expects to complete the activities.

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that evaluation procedures are technically sound, are neither culturally nor racially discriminatory, and are administered by trained personnel. The district also ensures that students with disabilities receive a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who utilize a variety of assessment tools and strategies to assess the student in all areas of suspected disability. Written reports prepared by Child Study Team members included the use of standardized tests or measures.

The district accurately identified acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations as an area of need in their self-assessment document. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding the required components of functional assessment and the use of screening/inventories by the child study team members prior to a referral for an evaluation.

Area(s) of Need:

Inventories/Screenings-Record review and interviews with the coordinator and staff, indicated that the district sometimes conducts inventories/screenings by child study team members prior to obtaining parental consent as part of the Intervention and Referral Service (I&RS) pre-referral process.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that inventories/screenings are not conducted prior to parental consent or as part of the I&RS process. The district is directed to cease utilizing inventories/screenings as part of the pre-referral process.

Functional Assessment-Although functional assessments are conducted, written reports resulting from did not consistently include interviews with parents and/or teachers or a developmental/educational history.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that written reports resulting functional assessments consistently include interviews with parents and/or teachers and a developmental/educational history.

Acceptance/Rejection of Reports - The district identified in the self assessment document that when reports from other child study team members or specialists from other public education agencies, approved clinics or agencies or professionals in private practice, are submitted to the IEP team for consideration, there are no formal procedures in place to accept/reject these reports.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address how they will accept or reject reports from specialists or other public education agencies, approved clinics or agencies or professionals in private practice. However, the district must revise its plan to include a procedure to ensure that a written rationale is provided to the parent when part or parts of an evaluation report is rejected.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district Board of Education ensures that students with disabilities are evaluated every three years or sooner if conditions warrant. The IEP team meets to review existing data to decide whether additional information is needed. Timelines, meeting participants and parental consent are all areas of compliance. The required missing component of the Meeting Notices is identified in Section III, and the district has been directed to revise its notice forms, or to use the letters developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Section VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that a student is determined eligible and classified “eligible for special education programs and related services” when the student has one or more of the disabilities defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5 (c) 1 through 13, the disability adversely affects the student’s educational performance, and the student is in need of special education programs and related services. The district also ensures that students are determined eligible and classified “eligible for speech-language services” when the student has a speech-language disorder that adversely affects classroom performance and the student requires only speech-language services.

The district identified Eligibility as an area of need in the self assessment document. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, another area of need was identified regarding documentation of the provision of copies of child study team and/or speech-language evaluations to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents-Information obtained through record review and staff interviews indicated the district does not document that copies of child study team and/or speech-language evaluation reports are provided to parents.

- The district will develop an improvement plan that establishes a procedure for ensuring that parents are provided with copies of child study team and/or speech-language evaluations, and that this is documented in the student record.

Eligibility Criteria for Specific Learning Disability-The district identified an area of need with regard to the adoption of a statistical formula and criteria when making a determination whether a severe discrepancy exists for the category Specific Learning Disability.

- The district has accurately identified the need for a statistical formula and developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

Referral form for Speech-Language Specialists' to refer to the Child Study Team-The district acknowledged in their self-assessment document that there are no written

referral procedures for speech-language specialists to follow when referring a potentially disabled student to the Child Study Team.

- The district has accurately identified the need for a written referral procedure and has developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

Section VIII. IEP:

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that the appropriate team members conduct an IEP meeting to develop, review and if necessary, revise the IEP for those students determined eligible for special education and related services and for students determined eligible for speech-language services. IEPs are implemented, in effect as required, and are reviewed at least annually.

Notices and meeting participants are areas that have been determined compliant in Section III.

The district identified in their self-assessment document the need to develop behavioral intervention plans. However, during the onsite monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding missing components of the IEP for students classified eligible for speech-language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Behavioral Intervention Plans- The self assessment document indicated the need for the district to consistently include behavioral intervention plans in the IEPs of all students whose behavior impedes his/her learning or that of others.

- The district has accurately identified a need to include Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) in the IEPs of students who require such plans and has developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

IEP Components and Consideration- IEPs for students classified eligible for speech-language services were missing the following components and consideration:

- Modifications and supplemental aides and services in the regular education classroom;
- Modifications and extracurricular and nonacademic activities;
- Supports for school personnel;
- Participation in district and State Assessment program;
- Extended school year;
- Statement of transition services related to communication skills

beginning at age 14, if appropriate; and the

-Short Procedural Safeguards Statement.

- The district is directed to develop an improvement plan to ensure that IEPs for students classified eligible for speech-language services are developed with the appropriate considerations and required statements. It is recommended that the district begin utilizing the state model Speech IEP which includes the required components, considerations and statements.

Section IX. Least Restrictive Environment:

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures placement in the least restrictive environment by making available a continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, the district ensures that the placement of a student with a disability is determined at least annually, and that the placement is based on his/her IEP. The district also ensures that students, K-8 with disabilities, are educated to the extent appropriate, with their non-disabled peers. Notices regarding district activities are sent to those students who are currently educated in out-of-district placements.

The district has identified preschool options as an area of need in the self-assessment.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Preschool Considerations-The district has accurately identified in self assessment that it needs to consider and document the option of placement in an early childhood program with appropriate supplemental aides and services as the first placement option for preschooler with disabilities.

- The district has accurately identified the need to consider, document and place, as appropriate, preschool disabled students in early childhood programs and has developed an improvement plan to correct this area of need.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

The district is currently in the process of reviewing and revising its procedures. These procedures will be forwarded to the county office for review and approval.

The district has accurately identified tracking and/or monitoring the number of days of removal as an area of need in the self-assessment document.

Area of Need:

Notification to Case Manager-The district has indicated that there has never been a need to implement disciplinary procedures. However, the district indicated it would like to have such procedures in place, if and when, the need arises.

- The district has developed an improvement plan to notify the case manager that is insufficient to correct this area of need. The district will revise its notification to the case manager to include a description of the reason(s) for the action, which is being taken. The plan should also include procedures to track and/or monitor, the number of days a classified student has been removed.

Section XII. Statewide Assessment:

Summary of Findings:

With the exception of one student, all students in the East Amwell School District participate in statewide assessment programs with appropriate modifications and accommodations, when necessary.

The district identified an element of statewide assessment as an area of need in the self-assessment.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Study Team review of statewide assessments -The district has indicated that child study team members need to become more familiar with statewide assessments by accessing copies of the various assessments for review.

- The district has developed an improvement plan to ensure the knowledge of team members regarding Statewide Assessment. It is recommended that Child study teams obtain "The Directory of Test Specifications" for each content area and /or the sample form of the ESPA and/or GEPA from the district's test coordinator. This information may also be accessed directly from the New Jersey State Department of Education's website. Since these are "secure" documents, the district may not recommend that child study team members obtain copies of these assessments from the test coordinator.

Section XIII. Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

Since East Amwell is a K-8 school district, there is no need to identify graduation requirements in IEPs.

Section XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

Interviews with the coordinator, parents and staff indicated that programs for disabled students are provided in accordance with code, specifically, class size, teacher

certification, transportation, and home instruction. Child study team members are employees of the East Amwell Board of Education. The district operates an after school tutorial program for special education students needing assistance with homework.

The district identified Programs and Services as an area of need in the self-assessment.

However, during the onsite monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified in Programs and Services regarding the provision of collaborative planning time for special education teachers.

Area (s) of Need:

Consideration of In-class Support-The self-assessment document has identified the district's need to develop a team-teaching model and consider in-class replacement as a more frequently used placement option rather than a resource center pull out replacement program.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to correct this area of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to include the assurance that the description of the team teaching model is provided to the county office of education.
- The district will also revise its improvement plan to identify the procedures it will follow to ensure that any placement option, including in-class replacement, is determined and based on the individual needs of students, and not on the availability of programs offered by the district.

Collaborative planning time-In interviews with the coordinator and staff, it was reported that special education teachers are not being provided with consultation time with general education staff.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that special education teachers and general education staff are afforded the opportunity to collaborate with each other.

Section XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

The district has met its responsibility to ensure that records are collected, maintained, secured, assessed and destroyed in accordance with state and federal regulations. A review of student records indicated that access sheets were found in child study team records.

However, during the onsite monitoring, an area of need was identified in Student Records that had not been identified in the self-assessment regarding access sheets in speech/language records and the identification of the location of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Missing Access sheets in Speech/Language records-A review of speech-language records indicated that access sheets were missing from these records.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that access sheets are available in all speech/language records.

Location of other files-A review of central files indicated that the location of other records, such as medical and child study team records were not identified.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure that central files indicate the location of additional files.

SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the East Amwell School District on September 18th and 19th, 2000. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. As a result of the thorough and comprehensive review conducted by the district during the self-assessment process, the district was able to self-identify a number of areas that require improvement.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. During the on-site monitoring an after-school tutoring program for classified students was identified as unique and beneficial to students in the district. This program is offered one hour a day for four days a week and is staffed by both regular and special education teachers.

The on-site visit determined that the district provides a free and appropriate education for all students; adheres to all required timelines; has required participants in attendance at all meetings; has technically sound evaluation procedures; recruits and hires certified staff to provide programs and services; provides students a variety of options to participate in regular and special education programs; ensures that all students have the opportunity to participate in state wide assessment; and provides transition services from early intervention to pre-school.

The on-site visit further identified areas of need within the various standards regarding documentation of reports and evaluations, issues with access and location of pupil records, procedural issues and staff training needs.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to develop an improvement plan to address these areas of needs.

