

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

District: East Greenwich Township School District **County:** Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: May 4 and 5, 2004

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the East Greenwich 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 East Greenwich 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 East Greenwich 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 Samuel Mickle School on February 23, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Approximately 14 parents attended this meeting, as well as a representative from the Board of Education and several district employees. While parents expressed satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, they did express concerns regarding a number of issues including provision of speech services, extended school year, accommodations and modifications in the regular education setting, continuum of special education services and timelines. In addition, participants voiced a desire to establish a parent support group. Many of these issues were identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

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

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education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for providing a number of partner programs (pairing older and younger students in academic projects). These projects are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled students. Math Magic partners third and sixth grade students in several planned collaborative math activities. Third graders also participate in the Young Authors program, in which high school honors students help them to write, illustrate, and publish a book. The Kindness Pals program pairs students in various grade levels in a number of shared activities during the course of the school year.

The district operates a developmental kindergarten program, open to all students, disabled or non-disabled. This program provides an additional year of growth and maturity for any student who is not yet ready for kindergarten.

For the past ten years, the district has also maintained a Wild Site, a natural outside habitat. Students are involved in a number of cross-curricular activities during the year, taking part in all aspects of maintaining the site.

The district supports the arts in showcasing the talents and abilities of all students through end-of-year programs, talent demonstrations, grade level musicals and concerts, art shows and grade level bands and choirs.

Part One Data Summary:

The data submitted by the district indicates that 25% of preschool students are placed in separate programs, which is well above the state average of approximately 10%. Subsequent to submitting the self-assessment document, the district identified a need to provide more in-district options for students currently in separate settings. Plans include establishing a program for autistic students as well as a self-contained class at the Jeffrey Clark School. The district is also working with other local districts to establish regional programs.

Additional data submitted by the district indicates that 80% of school-aged students are placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day. The district is commended for its commitment to educate students with disabilities in general education settings. In keeping with this positive trend, the district has developed plans to expand supports and services provided in regular education. The district plans to establish several full-time co-teaching classes at the Samuel Mickle School next year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and **Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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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 areas of staff development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because although numerous training opportunities have been provided during the current school year, the identified timeline to conduct a needs assessment for future professional development has passed. The district must revise its improvement plan to identify new timelines and implement the activities by the newly identified timelines.**

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 provision of OT, PT, and counseling, adaptive PE, length of school day/year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and provision of speech language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns regarding goals and objectives for related services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding procedures for transfer students. **While on-site monitoring determined that the district has begun to implement activities to bring about correction in this area, it was noted that the speech language specialist does not give consideration to testing information provided from the previous district. As a result, provision of services is delayed until new testing can be completed. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include activities to ensure that speech language evaluation information is considered and that speech language services are provided in a timely fashion, either through implementation of the current IEP or development of an interim IEP. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, written notice, native language, and timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because although these areas have been corrected for students eligible for special education and related services, the plan does not include activities for students who are eligible for speech-language services only. The plan must include these activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of new activities.**

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, health summary, and vision/hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of summer referrals and identification meeting participants. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding backlogged referrals and identification meeting timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because although these areas have been corrected for students referred to the child study team, the plan does not include activities for students who are referred for speech-language services. The plan must include these activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of new activities.**

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, use of standardized assessments, components of functional assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluations for students turning age five. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because although this area has been corrected for students eligible for special education and related services, the plan does not include activities for students who are eligible for speech-language services only. The plan must include activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of new activities.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding declassification procedures for speech students and written notice.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech Declassification Procedures - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently conduct a reevaluation for students classified as eligible for speech-language services prior to declassifying the student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a reevaluation is conducted when considering a change in eligibility for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. The implementation of these activities will ensure that an appropriate evaluation is conducted to determine the eligibility status of speech students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

Written Notice - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that when the district proposes to continue eligibility without conducting assessments, written notice does not include a statement informing the parents of their right to request an assessment.

- **The district will revise its written notice to ensure that notice of reevaluation informs parents of their right to request an assessment. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice of reevaluation developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. Implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed regarding their rights.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, eligibility criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because although this area has been corrected for students eligible for special education and related services, the plan does not include activities for students who are eligible for speech-language services only. The plan must include activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of new activities.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement/disagreement.

Area(s) of Need:

Signatures of Agreement/Disagreement - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, only child study team members are signing agreement or disagreement with the eligibility determination. Teachers are not included. In addition, the eligibility documentation for students referred for speech-language services does not include any form where district members of the team may indicate their agreement or disagreement with the eligibility decision.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all district members of the IEP team sign agreement or disagreement with the eligibility determinations. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully informed of differing opinions regarding eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for revising IEPs, age of majority, and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, IEP components, goals and objectives, annual review procedures and timelines, and development of IEPs prior to provision of services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of written notice (IEP) within 15 days and 90-day timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because although these areas have been corrected for students eligible for special education and relate services, the plan does not include activities for students who are eligible for speech-language services only. The plan must include activities and an administrative oversight component to**

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ensure consistent implementation of new activities. The district also identified concerns regarding having IEPs in effect at the start of the school year for all classified pupils. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because the timelines have expired. The district must identify new timelines for completion and implement the activities within those newly identified timelines.**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and access to regular education programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, continuum and removal from general education, and placements based on IEPs for preschool and school-aged students. Barriers included building capacity and funding. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student and agency invitations, agency involvements, and statements of transition services needs.

No 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 area of preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of implementation of IEPs by age three. On-site monitoring 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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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child study team staffing, supervision, and case management. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in 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 East Greenwich Township School District on May 3, 4, and 5, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this 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 prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, a number of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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 submitted by the district during the self-assessment process indicates that preschool students are placed in separate settings at a rate which is well above the state average. The district has developed activities to address placement in separate settings through their improvement plan. Additionally, the district has reported positive trends in student placement in general education settings. In keeping with these positive trends, the district has made a commitment to establish additional support services in general education settings.

Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Student Records and Graduation were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In addition, parents expressed concerns on several issues such as provision of related services, communication, and extended school year. Many of the concerns raised by parents have been addressed in the district's improvement plan.

In addition to the standards identified above, 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, provision of OT, PT and counseling, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary assessments, use of standardized assessments, components of functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, eligibility, procedures for revising IEPs, age of majority, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities, access to general education programs, student/agency invitations, agency involvements, statements of transition service needs, preschool transition planning conferences, class size, age range, group size for speech therapy, homebound instruction, common planning time, parents/adult student access to records, procedures for maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of locations of pupil records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, extended school year, provision of speech therapy, goals and objectives for related services, transfer procedures, consent, written notice, native language, evaluation timelines, referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of reports, reevaluations for students turning five, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting participants, IEP components, annual reviews, development of IEPs prior to the start of the school year and prior to the provision of services, individualized decision-making, continuum, removal from general education, placements based on IEPs, implementation of IEPs for preschoolers by age three, child study team staffing, supervision, and case management.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding dismissal procedures for students eligible for speech-language services, written notice of reevaluation, and signatures of agreement/disagreement.

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