

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

District: Eastampton Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: January 11 and 12, 2005

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Eastampton 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 Eastampton Township 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 Eastampton 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 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 Eastampton Township Middle School, on December 13, 2004. 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 also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides a website for students and parents with information for non-traditional learners. A newsletter is also sent two times monthly to parents regarding special education resources and information.

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The district provides paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities in extracurricular activities, such as basketball, art club, and drama club. The district is also demonstrating a commitment to including students with their nondisabled peers by their involvement in the Inclusion Project with Burlington County Institute of Technology.

The district utilizes student volunteers from Burlington County Community College to provide tutoring in math to all students who wish to participate two times weekly after school. This program also extends into the summer months. The elementary school principal initiated the program with all students educated in kindergarten through third grade.

Data Summary:

The district's data indicated a decrease in the number of students with disabilities (excluding students receiving speech and language services), from 129 in 2002 to 107 in 2004 (15.5% to 13%). There has been a trend over the past three years to increase the number of students with disabilities in general education for the majority of their school day. In 2004, a total of 86.5% of students with disabilities (including speech students) were educated in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day compared to the state average of 44.9%. The district data demonstrate a significant increase from 69.7% in 2003 and 39.5% in 2002. This is reflective of the district's commitment to inclusion. The district has provided general education staff with extensive training in differentiating instruction.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Statewide Assessment, Graduation, 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 indicated compliance in the areas of staff and parent development and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives for counseling as a related service.

Area of Need:

Goals and Objectives for Counseling—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that goals and objectives are not written for students who receive counseling as a related service.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that goals and objectives are provided for students who receive counseling as a related service. Goals and objectives must be included in the students' IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that every student who requires counseling as a related service has measurable goals and objectives on which progress can be reported. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of meetings and written notice, including provision of the short procedural safeguards statement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. It should be noted that although the district initially identified provision of the Short Procedural Safeguards Statement as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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

Area of Need:

Written Notices in Native Language—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although the district includes an interpreter at all meetings for students whose parents' native language is not English, written notice is not provided in the parents' native language.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that written notice is provided to parents whose native language is that other than English. Implementation of this activity will ensure that parents are fully informed of any decisions made after a meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of prereferral interventions, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of overrepresentation of minority students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns in the area of child find ages 3-21, referral procedures, specifically, referral forms. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments for students evaluated for special education and related services, written reports for students evaluated for special education and related services, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments for students evaluated for speech and language services, written reports for students evaluated for speech and language services, and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

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

Area of Need:

Multi-Disciplinary Assessments—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district is not consistently completing two child study team assessments for an evaluation for students referred for

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special education and related services. The district was completing one child study team assessment and a speech and language assessment as part of the evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at least two child study team assessments are completed as part of an evaluation for students referred for special education and related services. A speech and language evaluation will be considered one of the two child study team evaluations for a child referred for a communication impairment only. Implementation of these procedures will ensure that students referred for special education and related services are evaluated properly and that appropriate criteria can be used to determine eligibility for students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of planning meetings, participants, and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, signatures of agreement/disagreement with a rationale, statement of eligibility, and evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to eligibility for students considered for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to eligibility for students considered for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has brought about correction in this area.

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

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual reviews, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of present levels of educational performance (PLEP) and teacher knowledge and access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, general education access, and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification and participation of students in out-of-district settings. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in this area.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, student and agency invitation, age 16 needed transition services, and preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for transition to the regional high school. This district educates students in preschool through 8th grade. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention programs to preschool disabled programs by age 3.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notification of removal to case manager and interim alternative educational settings. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in these areas.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, maintenance of records, and documentation of locations of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets and destruction of records. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought 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 Eastampton Township School District on January 11 and 12, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to 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, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated that the district has decreased the percentage of students in separate schools and in general education 40% of the day, while significantly increasing the percentage of students in general education more than 80% of the school day. The district's commitment to inclusion and providing comprehensive staff development contributes to the success of educating students with disabilities in general education.

Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, particularly the preschool disabled program and speech and language services, through random phone calls made by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included staff and parent development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, prereferral interventions, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments for students evaluated for special education and related services, written reports for students evaluated for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations for students turning age five, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, signatures of agreement/disagreement with a rationale, statement of eligibility, evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to eligibility for students considered for special education and related services, IEP meetings, participants, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual reviews, 90-day timelines, individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, general education access, continuum, age 14 transition service needs, student and agency invitation, age 16 needed transition services, preferences and interests, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention programs to preschool disabled programs by age three, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students,

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suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, parent/adult student access to records, maintenance of records, and documentation of locations of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, notice of meetings, written notices, short procedural safeguards statement, child find ages 3-21, overrepresentation of minority students, referral procedures, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students evaluated for speech and language services, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, written reports for students evaluated for speech and language services, reevaluation timelines, evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility for students evaluated for speech and language services, present levels of performance, teacher knowledge and access, notification and participation of students in out-of-district settings, transition procedures for 8th grade students to the regional high school, notification of suspensions to the case manager, interim alternative educational settings, home instruction, access sheets and destruction of student IEPs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives for counseling as a related service, written notice in native language, and multi-disciplinary assessments.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Eastampton Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those additional areas of need identified in this report.