

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

**District:** Edgewater School District

**County:** Bergen

**Monitoring Dates:** September 29 and 30, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Gladys Miller, Zola Mills and Susan Wilson

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Edgewater School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Edgewater 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 Edgewater 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 Eleanor Van Gelder Elementary School on September 25, 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 administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for the mentoring program for second and third grade students. This program matches community volunteers with students for a 1:1 reading experience and extends over two semesters, once a week for twelve weeks each session.

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The district provides an after school homework club open to all students to receive homework support four days a week after school.

The district also provides hands on science labs starting in kindergarten, a family math program, earth day and veteran's day and support our troops projects.

### **Data Summary:**

The Edgewater School District reported a total classification rate for public students with disabilities of 11% in 2002 which is below the state average of 14.1%. These data indicated that 29% of students eligible for special education and related services spend more than 80% of the day in general education which is below the state average of 41.6%. Data also indicate that 56% of students classified as pre-school disabled participate in general education early childhood settings which exceeds the state average of 21.7.

### ***Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:***

**Reevaluation** 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 dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures and staff and parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of related services, extended school year, transfer students and hearing aides. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately 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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**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parental participation at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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 referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, identification meeting participants, timelines and health summaries. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized and functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written reports and acceptance or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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**Section VI: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement or disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of providing copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 areas of ninety day timelines, implementation dates for students eligible for special education and related services, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documenting parental participation at meetings, providing copies of IEP's to parents, teacher knowledge of IEP, considerations and required statements regarding statewide assessments and extra curricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 areas of the decision-making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 identified themselves compliant in the area of early intervention program to pre-school disabled by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-school transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedural safeguards and documentation to case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

**Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternate assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child study team knowledge of testing. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

**Section XIII: Graduation**

**Summary of Findings:**

The Edgewater School district is an elementary school district and is not required to address compliance regarding graduation as it pertains to secondary school

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requirements. However, during the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of invitation and participation of out-of-district students in their elementary school graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, group sizes and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age range waivers, consultation time, insufficient staff and a description of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance of records and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, destruction of records and staff knowledge of procedures. 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 Edgewater School District on September 29 and 30, 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 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 will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address these areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas that 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 district data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students in the regular education setting for more than 80% of the school day. The district also provides general education placement for 56% of their pre-school students. The district data indicates classification rates lower than the state average.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Two parents attended the focus meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. One parent expressed concerns similar to those identified by the district during the self assessment process. The other parent expressed satisfaction with the district programs and services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral intervention, direct referral, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluation, all areas of reevaluation, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement disagreement, IEP meetings, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, suspension tracking manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards for discipline, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternate assessment, class size waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction notification, access sheets, maintenance of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff and parent training, extended school year, provision of speech therapy, transfer students, certifications, hearing aids, parent participation at meetings, Child Find 3-21, health summary, identification meeting timelines and participants, written reports, acceptance or rejection of reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting participants, consideration and required statements, IEPs to parents, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision

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making, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district, notification and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, participation at pre-school transition planning conference, documentation to case manager and suspension tracking for discipline, child study team knowledge of statewide assessments, age range waivers, consultation time, sufficient staff, description of programs, access requests and destruction of records and staff knowledge of procedures for student records.