

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

District: Edison Township **County:** Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: May 7-11, 2001

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Background Information:

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Edison School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. 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. As the first step in the self-assessment process, the parents, staff and members of the community of the School District were invited to attend a focus group public meeting.

A steering committee comprised of administrators, educators, related service staff, the curriculum resource teacher, the transition coordinator and parents was established to review information. Based on the information collected by the district, a report of findings was developed identifying areas of strength and areas that need improvement. The Edison Township School District developed an improvement plan to address the areas of need identified by the district that included activities for compliance and/or improvement and oversight components.

A second focus group public meeting was held in the district on May 3, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents expressed positive comments about teachers, case managers, communication between parents and staff, transition from EIP to preschool and transition from middle school to high school. Some of the concerns identified by parents were measurable goals and objectives, the full placement continuum, and not receiving copies of IEPs.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring visit from May 7, 2001 to May 11, 2001 to verify the issues identified and to address the appropriateness of the improvement plan as well as the progress made in implementing the plan. During the on-site monitoring visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documentation including policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, and related service providers and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's director, supervisors of special education, assistant supervisors of special education, building principals, vice principals, transition coordinator, guidance counselor, child study team members, speech and language specialists, special education teachers and regular education teachers. Telephone interviews were also conducted with parents of students with disabilities. Additionally, school buildings and a representative sample of special education classes and in-class

support classes were visited. District compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey Administrative Code for Special Education (N.J.A.C. 6A:14) was assessed.

District Strengths:

Special Education Staff Newsletter-The district publishes a newsletter that is mailed to special education teachers on a quarterly basis. The focus of the newsletter is to discuss current issues in special education, best practices, strategies for instruction and behavior management concerns.

Special Education Parent Newsletter-The district publishes a newsletter that is distributed to parents of students with disabilities four times a year. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and educate parents regarding current special education practices and events in the district.

Edison Township Special Olympics Unified Sports Program- An inclusive program within the district's schools that places students with and without disabilities on the same teams as equals for training and competition. The purpose of the program is to prepare students with disabilities for community living by ensuring they participate in sports and have other recreational experiences.

Special Education Advisory Council-The district has had in place for many years, a broad-based Special Education Advisory Council. The advisory council meets bi-monthly to address the district's progress in achieving the goals established at the beginning of each school year.

Inclusion Handbook-The district's advisory council has developed a handbook that is distributed to parents when their child is initially referred to the child study team. The handbook illustrates the district's belief in educating students with disabilities in the their home school with chronological age peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to update board of education policies and procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

The district also identified the need to provide staff development regarding special education regulations and district policies and procedures. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the staff development. The district must revise its plan to include this mechanism.

Section II: FAPE

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to provide students with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) without delay, monitor the implementation of students' IEPs, expand the list of agencies that provide related services to students in out-of-district programs, monitor related services in out-of-district programs, develop transfer procedures and monitor timelines for placement of transfer students. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because the district has not identified the procedures it will implement to bring about the required correction or the manner in which the district will oversee the implementation of these procedures. The district will revise its plan to include these procedures as well as an oversight component. The district may wish to consider the provision of staff development to ensure a thorough understanding of these new procedures.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding counseling and extended school year.

Areas of Need:

Counseling- During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that although frequency and duration for counseling services were documented in some IEPs, most IEPs indicated counseling services were to be provided on an "as needed" basis. Additionally, most IEPs did not contain goals and objectives for counseling nor did individual service providers maintain documentation of the provision of services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure criteria are established when counseling services are provided on an "as needed" basis. These criteria must clearly identify the student behaviors that will serve to initiate the counseling services. The plan must include a mechanism to document these criteria in the IEP.**
- **The plan must also ensure that for all students receiving counseling services goals and objectives are developed and documented in IEPs.**
- **The plan must further ensure service providers are maintaining documentation of the provision of services for each student.**

Extended School Year- During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that extended school year services are not considered or documented in IEPs of all students with disabilities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year services are considered for all classified students and documented in each IEP.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to meet 20-day, 90-day and annual review timelines and to update child study team and speech/language forms and notices. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these procedures as well as an oversight component to ensure implementation of these new procedures. It is further recommended the district use the state notice forms.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding notices in native language, notices in files for Eligible for Speech/ Language Services and age of majority.

Areas of Need:

Native Language Notices- During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide written notice or PRISE in languages other than English, even when feasible.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent, whenever feasible.**

Notices for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services- During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide and/or document notices of a meeting and/or written notices for students eligible for speech/language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district provides and documents notice of a meeting and written notice for students eligible for speech/language services.**

Age of Majority- During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not inform parents and students at least three years before the student reaches age 18, of the transfer of rights.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the notification of transfer of rights at the Age of Majority is provided to both the parent(s) and the student at least three years before the student reaches age eighteen.**

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to maintain communication with early intervention programs to ensure that parents of pre-school age students identify their children for initial evaluation to determine eligibility of special education programs and services.

The district also identified the need to revise procedures regarding location, referral and identification (LRI), to review the racial-ethnic group representation in the referral process, and to provide training for child study teams and pupil assistance committees (PAC). The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an in-service component. The plan must be revised to include staff development and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.

Areas of Need:

Racial-Ethnic Representation-The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to review the racial-ethnic group representation in the referral process.

- **To assist the district in its data review and analysis to determine the factors leading to overrepresentation of minorities in special education, the district will participate in technical assistance sessions sponsored by OSEP during the 2001-2002 school year.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to review evaluation procedures, monitor and review child study teams' and speech/language specialists' selection of appropriate assessments, provide in-service training to child study teams and speech/language specialists, monitor evaluation plans and provide evaluations on an individual basis. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks the identification of procedures. The plan must be revised to include these procedures as well as an oversight mechanism to ensure implementation of these procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding copies of evaluation reports to parents and functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services.

Areas of Need:

Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not maintain documentation of the provision of speech/language or child study team evaluations to parents.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure copies of speech/language or child study team evaluations are provided to parents.**

Functional Assessments for Eligible for Speech/Language - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that evaluations for students potentially eligible for speech/language services did not contain all the required components.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the inclusion of all required components of a functional assessment in evaluations.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to monitor child study teams to ensure that students with disabilities are reevaluated every three years or sooner as necessary. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an oversight component. The district will revise the plan to include the procedures to bring about the required changes and an oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to review racial-ethnic representation in the eligibility decision-making process (addressed in Section IV) and to review child study team evaluation reports and eligibility summaries. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures. The district will revise the plan to include procedures to bring about the required changes and an oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.

Section VIII: Individual Education Plan

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to monitor meeting participants, IEP implementation dates, considerations and required statements in IEPs, and training needs regarding the development of IEPs. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures. The plan must be revised to include procedures to bring about the required changes and an oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding an IEP component.

Areas of Need:

Supports for Staff - During the on-site, record review indicated that the "statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel" was not included in the district's IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district's IEPs contains a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that shall be provided for the student.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to increase the placement rate of students with disabilities in regular education with appropriate supplementary aids and/or services and to monitor the decision-making process. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need.

Areas of Need:

Regular Education Considerations -The district identified the need to increase the number of students placed in regular education with appropriate supplementary aids and services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the determination of educational placements is based on the individual needs of students and not on program availability, including supplementary aids and services, or staffing limitations.**

Section X: Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need for the curriculum resource teacher to coordinate transition service needs and assist students, parents and staff in the development of the transition plan component of the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding agency involvement and documentation of student and agency invitations to meetings.

Areas of Need:

Monitoring/Documentation of Transition Services by Outside Agencies - During the on-site monitoring it was determined the district does not monitor or document the activities of outside agencies to ensure these agencies provide the necessary transition services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district monitors and documents the provision of transition services by outside agencies as required by the IEP.**

Documentation of Invitations - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not document invitations to agencies responsible for providing and/or paying for transition services or to students aged 14 or older.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the documentation of agency and student invitations to IEP meetings.**

Section X: Transition from Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to coordinate with early intervention programs the identification of preschool children with disabilities and monitor preschool child study teams' casework logs and IEPs. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding inclusive preschool program considerations.

Area of Need:

Inclusive Preschool Program Considerations - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district has not established any formal linkages with community preschools resulting in a lack of consideration of these options during the IEP process.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to ensure that formal linkages with preschools in the community are established and that inclusive settings for all preschoolers are considered and discussed at IEP meetings.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to provide training for principals, assistant principals and child study teams regarding discipline procedures and a need to review suspension reports from schools. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the training issue because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of any training provided to district staff members. The plan must be revised to include this component.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to review rosters for participation in statewide assessment, coordinate participation in statewide assessment with district test coordinator and improve student performance on statewide assessments. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the participation issue.

Areas of Need:

Participation in Statewide Assessment -The district identified the need to ensure students are provided with the accommodations and modifications required by their IEPs when participating in statewide assessments.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the required modifications and/or accommodations for statewide assessments are provided. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to ensure that students with disabilities participate in graduation exercises, graduation requirements, and the need to decrease the dropout rate of students with disabilities. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks the procedures required to bring about the changes.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding notification to out-of-district students of graduation activities.

Areas of Need:

Notification/Participation to Out-of-District Students - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not document attempts to secure participation of out-of-district students in senior activities and graduation activities/ceremonies.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that out-of-district students are provided the opportunity to participate in the district's graduation activities and ceremonies and that attempts and activities to secure their participation are documented in student records.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to monitor class size, review child study team caseloads and speech/language enrollments and review racial-

ethnic representation in programs (addressed in Section IV). The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the class size issue.

Areas of Need:

Class Size -The district identified the need to monitor class size. However, the district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address how the district will establish and maintain class sizes in accordance with code.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that class sizes are established and maintained according to code. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with these requirements.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to review procedures regarding the maintenance of student records, the provision of student records to parents or adult students upon request and the destruction of student records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the documentation of the location of other records.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Location of Other Records - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that students' cumulative files do not identify the location of other files.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the identification of the location of other files is maintained in the central file.**

SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Edison Township School District on May 7-11, 2001. 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. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process that allowed the district to self-identify most areas that require improvement. Furthermore, the district was able to develop an improvement plan that with revisions will be sufficient to correct the areas of need identified during the self-assessment.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring, parents expressed both positive and negative comments. It should be noted that these concerns as well as a number of other areas, were also identified by the district during the self-assessment process and the district has already initiated actions to bring about improvement in many of these areas.

During self-assessment the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, transfer students, timelines, referral and evaluation procedures, IEP decision-making processes, supplementary aids and services, coordination of services and personnel in preschool and post-school activities, class size issues, participation in statewide assessments and graduation activities, and pupil records issues.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need regarding the determination of counseling services, extended school year, notices, reports to parents, agency involvement in secondary transition, inclusive preschool programs, notification of graduation activities to out-of-district students and the documentation of location of other records.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of this monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit its improvement plan to the Office of Special Education. In areas requiring the development of procedures, the improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation. In addition, any improvement plan activity that requires staff development must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service.

