

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

District: Elizabeth **Monitoring Dates:** November 20,21,22,27,28,29,2000

Monitoring Team: Stephen A. Coplin, Debbie Masarsky, Barbara Tucker, Bill Freeman, Melinda Zangrillo, Sandy Gogerty, Marie Deisler

Background Information:

The parents and staff of the Elizabeth 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 information. Based on the information collected by the district, a report of findings 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 October 25, 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, some of the concerns identified by parents included notification of extra curricular activities for students placed in the district and for those students placed in out-of-district programs, discipline, transportation, procedures regarding transfer students, length of the school day, least restrictive environment issues, related services, modifications to programs, and the curricula used for special education students. Parents expressed positive comments about their individual children's teachers, schools, programs and transition planning.

District Strengths:

The district provides several unique programs that include students with disabilities. For the past three years the district has funded four teaching positions. These teachers are assigned the responsibility to ensure successful mainstreaming. One teacher is assigned to the elementary level, one to the middle school and two at the high school. All four mainstream facilitators work with regular education teachers on an individual basis and in group in-service workshops. Additionally, they provide support for classroom assistants and personal aides.

In collaboration with the city of Elizabeth, the district provides a Saturday/Summer Recreation Program. These programs provide a partial academic enrichment program while also providing a safe, structured recreation environment for 75 to 125 students who are too disabled to participate in more mainstreamed recreational activities.

The district has encouraged schools to enhance their Whole School Reform model by providing after school and summer tutorial programs. These programs focus primarily on improving skills necessary to pass the state's standardized 4th grade and 8th grade assessments (ESPA & GEPA). Special needs students are encouraged to participate in these programs.

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 has revised its procedures and has forwarded them 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.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for further staff development and for the timely submission of staff reports by contracted personnel.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Development- The self-assessment document indicated the need for participation by all professional and paraprofessional staff in further training sessions regarding participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and the core curriculum content standards.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Staff Reports-The self-assessment document indicated the need for the timely submission of final evaluation reports by contracted child study teams.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

The district provides a system of free, appropriate special education and related services to students with disabilities, age three through twenty-one at public expense, under public supervision, and with no charge to the parent. All students with disabilities are placed in facilities or programs that have been approved by the Department of Education. The academic year for students with disabilities is at least as long as that established for non-disabled students. Transportation for students in out-of-district-placements is provided consistent with the school calendar for the receiving school. Students with disabilities experience a smooth transition into preschool programs by their third birthday and required actions are implemented when a preschool age or

school age student is referred for an initial evaluation to determine eligibility for special education programs and services. All students with disabilities have available to them a variety of educational programs and services which are available to their non-disabled peers that include nonacademic and extra curricular services and activities such as assemblies, field trips, sports, clubs, and lunch.

The self-assessment document indicated the need to: hire certified professional staff, provide a school day for disabled students that is at least as long as that established for non-disabled students, monitor and document the delivery of programs and services to students with disabilities including out-of-district placements, conduct IEP meetings prior to any changes in program or service and ensure that all IEPs contain goals and short-term objectives, provide related services to students with disabilities, and provide in-service training for administrative personnel related to transfer procedures.

During the on-site monitoring visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding documentation in IEPs of goals and objectives for related services, extended school year, and the documentation of the provision of FAPE for ninth grade classified students in the inclusion program.

Area(s) of Need:

Certification of Professional Staff-The self-assessment document indicated the need to hire certified and/or licensed professional staff members to fill vacancies.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Length of the School Day- The self-assessment document indicated the need to provide for all students with disabilities, a school day that is at least as long as that established for non-disabled students by placing students in neighborhood schools and increasing options and accommodations in individual buildings.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need. The plan must be revised to ensure that not only are students placed in neighborhood schools, but that students with disabilities are transported to arrive at school no later, and to depart from school no earlier than their non-disabled students.

Monitoring and Documentation of Programs and Services- The self-assessment document indicated the need to monitor and document the delivery of programs and services to students with disabilities including those students placed in out-of-district placements.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

IEPs- The self-assessment document indicated the need to ensure that IEP meetings are held prior to changes in the student's program or services and that all IEPs contain goals and short-term objectives.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Related Services- The self-assessment document indicated the need to ensure the provision of related services to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need. The plan must be revised to ensure not only the provision of related services to meet student needs but also the development of goals and objectives for these required related services.

Transfer Procedures- The self-assessment document indicated the need to provide in-service training for all administrative personnel related to transfer procedures.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Extended School Year- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the discussion and consideration of extended school year (ESY) programs for all students with disabilities during their IEP meetings.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that ESY is considered and documented in IEPs for all students. The district may wish to consider hiring certified special education teachers for the district's existing summer programs to implement the ESY portion of IEPs, when that type of certification is required.

FAPE Documentation- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the ninth grade inclusion program. Although the district provides free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities who participate in this program, it was determined that instructional services were not correctly documented in students' IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs accurately reflect the amount of time the special education teacher provides instruction to students with disabilities who participate in this program. The plan must include a mechanism to revise the IEPs of those students currently participating in this ninth grade inclusion program.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

The district has policies and procedures 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.

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

The district has developed procedures for selecting and training surrogate parents which have been forwarded to the County Office of Education for review and approval.

The district identified in its self-assessment document the need to revise their notice of a meeting, the need to document attempts to secure parental participation, and the need to ensure that notices are translated into parents' native language.

During the on-site monitoring visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding notices, timelines and age of majority.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a meeting- The self-assessment document indicated the need to revise the notice of a meeting for students beginning at age 14 or younger to include a statement that one of the purposes of the meeting is to address the transition needs of the student and to invite the student if appropriate.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Documentation of Parental Participation- The self-assessment document indicated the need to document all attempts to secure parental participation when parents are unavailable to attend meetings.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Notices in Native Language- The self-assessment document indicated the need to provide all notices in the parents' native language.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Notices- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the required components of notice of a meeting and written notice.

- The district will revise its notices to ensure they contain the required components. It is recommended that the district use the forms developed by the Office of Special Education.

Timelines- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding 20-day and 90-day timelines. A review of referral forms indicated that the date of referral was not clearly documented which interfered with the 20-day timeline for an identification meeting. A review of records and interviews with staff determined that 90-day timelines are not being met because it is difficult to get parents in for eligibility/IEP

meetings and to obtain written reports from outside evaluators (eg. Neurologicals) in a timely manner.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the date of receipt of the referral is clearly indicated to ensure teams comply with the 20-day meeting timeline.
- The district will revise its improvement plan to document their efforts to meet with parents and to obtain written reports of specialists prior to the expiration of the 90-day timeline.

Age of Majority- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding age of majority. Through record review and the interview process it was determined that prior to June 5, 2000 the district informed parents and students at least a year before their eighteenth birthday that rights under 6A:14 would transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority. The district was unaware that the amended regulation now requires notification to parents and students at least three years before the student reaches age 18.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that at least three years before the student reaches 18 the student and the parent are apprised of their rights regarding the age of majority.

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education has written procedures to locate, refer and evaluate students. Procedures provide for referral by district staff, parents, and agencies concerned with the welfare of students. The district disseminates Child Find information throughout the community in English and Spanish in the form of flyers as well as newspaper and television announcements. The district ensures that vision and hearing screenings are routinely conducted and documented for every student referred to the Child Study Team for an evaluation.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for further staff development regarding the use and documentation of alternative instructional strategies and interventions. In addition, the district identified the need to ensure protection under the disciplinary requirements for students identified as potentially disabled. Timeline issues are addressed in Section III of this document.

Area(s) of Need:

Alternative Instructional Strategies and Interventions- The self-assessment document indicated the need to provide further in-service training for staff and administrative personnel regarding the use and documentation of alternative instructional strategies and interventions.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Protection of Potentially Disabled Students- The self-assessment document indicated the need to ensure protection under the disciplinary requirements to students identified as potentially disabled.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that evaluations are administered by trained personnel and written reports are prepared by Child Study Team members. Evaluations are conducted in the native language of the student as appropriate.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to use evaluation procedures that are neither culturally or racially discriminatory, to document alternate administration of tests, to provide students with a comprehensive evaluation, to use appropriate evaluation procedures, to ensure that functional assessments are completed for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech and language services.

During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Non-discriminatory Evaluation Procedures- The self-assessment document indicated the need to ensure that evaluation procedures are technically sound and are neither culturally nor racially discriminatory.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Alternate Administration of Tests- The self-assessment document indicated the need to document alternate administration of tests.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Comprehensive Evaluation- The self-assessment document indicated the need to assess students in all areas of suspected disability.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Evaluation Procedures- The self-assessment document indicated the need to use standardized test(s) that are normed on a representative population.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Functional Assessments- The self-assessment document indicated the need to complete functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech and language services and to document the results in evaluation reports.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Acceptance/Rejection of Reports- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the consistent documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the documentation of the acceptance or rejection of reports or assessments from other agencies or specialists.

Section VI. Reevaluation:

Summary of Findings:

The district's IEP Teams meet to review existing data to decide whether additional information is needed to reevaluate students. When appropriate, the IEP Team determines the nature and scope of the reevaluation. A reevaluation is conducted when a change in eligibility is being considered. Upon request from a parent or teacher a reevaluation is conducted prior to the anniversary date without undue delay. Preschool disabled students are reevaluated prior to June 30th of their 5th birthday.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to conduct a multidisciplinary reevaluation within three years of the previous classification.

During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding notices that have been addressed in Section III.

Area of Need:

Reevaluations- The self-assessment document indicated the need to conduct a multidisciplinary reevaluation within three years of the previous classification.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that when an initial evaluation is completed for a student age 3-21, a meeting is conducted to determine whether a student is eligible for special education

and related services or eligible for speech–language services. Review of documentation and interviews with staff indicated that copies of speech language evaluations are provided to parents.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to document the participation of teachers at eligibility meetings and the need to in-service staff on eligibility criteria.

During the on-site monitoring visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding the documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents for students classified eligible for special education and related services and notice issues which were addressed in Section III.

Area(s) of Need:

Participants at Meetings- The self-assessment document indicated the need to document the participation of teachers at eligibility meetings.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Eligibility Criteria- The self-assessment document indicated the need to in-service child study team members and speech-language personnel on determining appropriate eligibility criteria.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Evaluation Reports- During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents for students classified eligible for special education and related services.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it provides and documents the provision of evaluation reports to parents no later than when it provides notice of the student’s eligibility.

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that for students attending in-district and out-of-districts programs, the appropriate team members participate in IEP meetings 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 developed with the appropriate considerations, required statements and components. The IEP is implemented as soon as possible, reviewed at least annually, and a copy is provided to the parent.

Issues regarding notices and meeting participants have been addressed in Section III.

The district identified in their self-assessment document problems with the participants at IEP meetings for students attending vocational programs, distribution of IEPs to school personnel, goals and objectives, components, required statements, and considerations.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Meeting Participants - The self-assessment document indicated the need for vocational personnel to participate as members of the IEP team in cases where a student attends a vocational school.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

IEP Distribution – The self-assessment document indicated the need to distribute IEPs to school personnel in a timely manner and to make the IEPs easily accessible to appropriate personnel.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

IEP Goals and Objectives – The self-assessment document indicated the need to develop benchmarks and short-term objectives related to progress in the general education curriculum and to develop more specific goals, short-term objectives or benchmarks to guide instruction.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need. The plan must be revised to ensure goals and objectives are developed on an individual basis.

Required Statements and Components – The self-assessment document indicated the need to develop comprehensive present levels of educational performance statements to include how the student’s disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum, and identifies specific areas of need.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Considerations - The self-assessment document indicated the need to consider and document the results of the most recent evaluation when developing the IEP.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 with disabilities are educated, to the extent appropriate, with their non-disabled peers. Regular education, with the appropriate supplementary aids and services is considered as the first option when determining placement. The district ensures that the student's placement is in an appropriate educational setting as close to home as possible.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to document that placement in special education classes occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in the regular education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Additionally, the district also identified the need to document when determining the educational placement, the comparison of the benefits provided in a regular class and the benefits provided in a special education class, as well as documenting the potentially beneficial or harmful effects a placement may have on the student and/or students in the class. The district has identified the need for students placed in out-of-district programs to be provided with opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities with their non-disabled peers. The district has identified the need to document the decision to educate students with disabilities in the school he/she would have attended if not disabled.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Considerations- The self-assessment document indicated the need to: document considerations when determining the educational placement of each student with a disability; include a statement that placement in special education classes occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in the regular education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily; document the comparison of the benefits provided in a regular class and the benefits provided in a special education class; and document the potentially beneficial or harmful effects a placement may have on the student and/or students in the class. It has also identified the need to document the consideration of educating the student in the school he/she would have attended if not disabled.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Participation in extracurricular activities with Non-disabled Peers – The self-assessment document indicated the need to provide students placed in out-of-district programs with the opportunity to participate in extracurricular services and activities with their non-disabled peers.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section X. Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

The district has identified a need to ensure a smooth transition from an early intervention program to a preschool program for students with disabilities. The district ensures placement in a preschool program by the child's third birthday.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to facilitate the transition from early intervention to preschool.

Area(s) of Need:

Transition from Early Intervention to Preschool - The self-assessment document indicated the need to facilitate the transition from early intervention to preschool.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section X. Transition From School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to document student and agency IEP meeting invitations, document the statement of needed transition services and linkages to appropriate agencies and the individuals serving as the liaison to post-secondary resources.

During on-site monitoring, additional areas of need were identified regarding documentation of the statement of transition service needs and technical consultation, students' interest and preferences, and the participation of other agencies.

Area(s) of Need:

Invitation to Meetings - The self-assessment document indicated the need to consistently document the invitation of the student and other agency representatives to the IEP meeting when transition services are discussed.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address the area of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure consistent documentation of student invitations to IEP meetings when transition services are considered, and agency invitations to IEP meetings when an agency is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.

Statement of Needed Transition Services - The self-assessment document indicated the need to consistently document the provision of transition services and agencies referred for post school services

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address the area of need. The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that students aged 16 and older, or younger if appropriate, consistently have included in their IEP a statement of needed transition services including instruction, related services, community experiences, employment, post-school adult living, daily living skills, functional vocational evaluation, and when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities, or any needed linkages.

Identification of Liaison - The self-assessment document indicated the need to ensure the consistent identification of the person or agency arranging and/or providing services.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Statement of Transition Service Needs – During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the statement of transition service needs. This statement is often not present or inappropriately written in student's IEP documents. Specific courses of study and documentation of technical consultation was not found in any of the reviewed IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that students aged 14 and older, or younger if appropriate, consistently have included in their IEPs a statement of transition service needs that focuses on the students' courses of study and includes, when appropriate, technical consultation from DVRS and other agencies providing transition services.

Student's Preferences and Interests – During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the student's preferences and interests. There was no indication that the student's preferences and interests are considered if the student does not attend the IEP meeting where transition services are discussed. In addition, interest and preference information was not documented appropriately in IEPs regardless of whether the student was present during the meeting.

Staff reported that the transition coordinator was solely responsible for the collection of this type of information for all students with disabilities in the district involved in transition. The transition coordinator reported maintaining a separate file for students that contained information that was not consistently shared with case managers or used during IEP meetings. Student files and IEP documents did not contain sufficient information regarding students' interests and preferences. The collection of information regarding students' interests and preferences should be a responsibility shared by several individuals as no one person could effectively do this for all the students with disabilities involved in transition.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that when transition services are discussed at an IEP meeting, there is consistent documentation that the student's interests and preferences were considered in the development of the IEP. It is recommended that teachers, case managers, and others share the responsibility for gathering information regarding student interests and preferences.

Participation of other agencies – During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of efforts to obtain the participation of an outside agency at an IEP meeting.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the consistent documentation of the other steps taken to obtain the participation of an agency that was invited but did not attend the IEP meeting.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary Of Findings:

The district indicated in the self-assessment document the need to notify the case manager when a student with a disability was going to be suspended, to document the implementation of discipline procedures, and to provide procedural safeguard rights to students identified as potentially educationally disabled.

It was determined through record review and interviews with district administrators and child study team members that students, whether classified or non-classified, are rarely removed beyond 10 days in a school year. The district has developed strategies and in-school programs to address behavioral needs. Additionally, the district has identified core teams consisting of administrators, child study team members, teachers and counselors to address behavioral issues by developing individual strategies and plans to eliminate or decrease the observed negative behaviors.

During the on-site monitoring visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding the procedures used to remove students for more serious offenses, the development of functional behavior assessment plans, and the development and implementation of behavior intervention plans.

Areas of Need:

Notification of the Case Manager – The self-assessment document indicated the need to notify the case managers when a classified student was being suspended. During the interview process administrators and team members indicated this notification was done informally and verbally. However, in response to the self-assessment process, new procedures have been developed and implemented on a district-wide basis.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this identified area of need. It is recommended that an administrative oversight component be included in the plan to ensure consistent implementation of the new procedures.

Functional Behavior Assessment Plans/BIPs – As a result of the inconsistent notification of case managers when classified students were suspended, teams were not developing FBA plans and were not conducting FBAs. Because FBAs were not conducted BIPs were not developed. However, it should be noted that based on interview information it appears that some members of the IEP team would meet prior to the student's removal to discuss strategies and techniques to address the student's behaviors. These discussions were not documented in the student records.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need. The district must revise its plan to include a procedure to ensure the convening of all members of the IEP team and to ensure the documentation of the development of an FBA plan and/or the review and revision made to the BIP.

Documentation of Manifestation Determinations – Because the removal of students rarely exceeds 10 days, the need to conduct manifestation meetings is rare. However,

the district determined during self-assessment that it did not have a procedure in place to ensure documentation of these meetings and these determinations.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this identified area of need. It is recommended that an administrative oversight component be included in the plan to ensure consistent implementation of the new procedures.

Removals for Serious Offenses – During the interview process it was identified that non-classified students involved in serious disciplinary incidents were required to attend a district administrative hearing to determine the district's response to these inappropriate behavior. As a result of this hearing, the child study team was directed to conduct an immediate evaluation. Neither the team members nor the parent had the right to dispute this decision or to determine an evaluation was not warranted.

- The district has corrected its procedure by revising its notification letter to indicate the student is now being referred to the child study team to conduct a meeting to determine the need for an evaluation.

Section XII. Statewide Assessment:

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education ensures that all students in the Elizabeth School District participate in statewide assessment programs with appropriate modifications and accommodations, when necessary.

The district identified two areas of need in the self-assessment document: the need to document in the IEP the reason why a student was exempt and why the statewide assessment was not appropriate; and the need to actively monitor all IEP's to ensure there are clearly stated descriptions of alternate assessments.

Areas of Need:

Documentation- The district indicated in the self-assessment document a need to consistently document why a classified student was exempt from statewide assessment.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Alternate Assessments- the district identified a need to actively monitor all IEP's to ensure there are clearly stated descriptions of alternate assessments.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section XIII. Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education ensures that IEPs developed for classified students in the Elizabeth School District beginning at age 14 include the district graduation requirements according to N.J.A.C. 6:8-7, with exceptions noted, when necessary.

The district identified in the self-assessment document a need to improve the procedures used to disseminate information to the parents and students in out-of-district placements regarding the schedule of events surrounding the graduation process.

Area of Need:

Procedures- The district identified a need to improve the procedures used to disseminate information to the parents and students in out-of-district placements regarding the graduation process and events surrounding that process.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

Interviews with the director, parents and staff indicated that programs and services 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 Elizabeth Board of Education.

The district identified several areas of need in the self-assessment document related to programs and services. The district identified a need to work towards ensuring the provision for required programs and services pursuant to the code, the need to provide time for case management for the child study team members, the need to provide teachers of resource programs time for consultation, and the need to provide adequate staff for support and replacement instruction. In the area of speech and language services the district identified the need to provide services in groups that do not exceed five students.

During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the in-class support programs.

Areas of Need:

Required programs and services- The self-assessment document identified the district's need to ensure provision of required programs and services through improved case management, reduced case-load, and the provision of evaluation services through contract agencies when needed.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

In-class Support Programs- During the on-site it was determined that students receiving in-class support did not have that program identified in their IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that the IEP appropriately reflects the in-class support program for classified students, when appropriate.

Section XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

The district has met its responsibility to ensure that records are collected, maintained, secured in accordance with state and federal regulations. A review of student records demonstrated that access sheets were included in each file and the central files documented the location of other records.

The district identified in the self-assessment document areas of need regarding student records. These areas included the need to have procedures in place that would ensure limited access to student records and the need to develop a procedure personnel would follow when amending student records.

Areas of Need:

Security/Access- The self-assessment document identified the district's need to limit access to appropriately authorized individuals.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Amendments to Student Records-The district identified the need to develop procedures to amend student records. The district also identified a need to develop procedures to provide appeal procedures concerning amendments to student records.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Elizabeth School District on November 20,21,22,27,28 and 29, 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 district's commitment to bring about positive outcomes for its students, a thorough and comprehensive review was conducted which resulted in the self-identification of a number of areas that required improvement. Prior to the on-site monitoring, the district had already begun to implement activities identified in its improvement plan

During the on-site monitoring, some unique and beneficial programs and/or practices were identified by the monitoring team. They included a mainstream facilitator program for students with disabilities that serves to improve the provision of mainstream services and enhances the benefits derived by both classified and non-classified students; the district's Saturday/Summer Recreation Program for students with more significant disabilities; and the after school and summer tutorial program.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, parents expressed positive comments about their individual children's teachers, individual schools and programs, and transition planning. Parents also expressed some concerns regarding the notification of extra curricular activities for students placed in the district and those placed in private schools, discipline, transportation, transfer student procedures, length of the school day, least restrictive environment issues, related services, modifications to programs and the curricula used for special education students. 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 initiate actions to bring about improvement in many of these areas.

The on-site monitoring determined that the district provides a free and appropriate education for all students and a variety of educational programs and services that are available to their non-disabled peers. The district complies with the regulatory requirements regarding consent and timelines for the provision of notice and annual reviews. The district has developed and implemented in an appropriate manner its procedures for referral by district staff and parents, for Child Find activities, for conducting evaluations, for providing students with a variety of options to participate in regular and special education programs, for developing IEPs, for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate in state wide assessment, and for maintaining pupil records.

The on-site visit further identified areas of need regarding documentation issues, issues disciplinary procedures, and timeline issues.

The district is required to revise its improvement plan and submit it to the Office of Special Education Programs within 45 days to address these additional areas of need.

