

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

District: Elk Township School District **County:** Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: December 21, 2004 and January 4 & 5, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Elk 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 Elk 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 Elk Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Aura Elementary School, on November 17, 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 superintendent, special education administrator, building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

DATA SUMMARY:

For the past three years, from 2001 to 2003, the district's classification rate has been slightly above the state average. For the same period, the percent of students with disabilities educated in the general education classroom at least 80% of the school day was below the state average. Based on these data, the district identified areas of

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concern in the self assessment regarding, continuum of placements, individual decision making and general education access. At the time of the on-site monitoring, the district had had made significant improvement in including students in the general education classroom for a greater part of the school day. Data for the 2004 school year indicates that the percentage of the students with disabilities who were educated in general education at least 80% of the school day had increased to 90.3%. This exceeded the state average of 41.9 %.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its efforts to support school initiatives by collaborating with other local school districts in pursuing grants for programs implemented in the school district. All students have benefited from the Service America Grant and the Kids Officially on Line Grant. The district has also worked collaboratively with other districts to provide professional development opportunities for staff.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation and **Preschool Transition** were 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 compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff development and training for parents. **Although the district has begun to implement activities in this area, the districts improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure the training brings about the anticipated outcomes. Furthermore the projected timelines identified in the improvement plan have not been met. Timelines must be revised. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 compliance in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of related services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding transfer students, extended school year and related service goals and objectives.

Areas of Need:

Transfer Students - Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that when a student eligible for speech and language services transfers into the district, a review of records and IEP is not documented in the students records.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district conducts an immediate review of the evaluation information and IEP and documents the review in the student's records. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student receives the services consistent with the IEP or if necessary, additional evaluations may be conducted or an IEP meeting is convened to revise the existing IEP or develop a new IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Extended School Year - Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that extended school year is not consistently discussed and considered for all classified students. Furthermore, all required components of extended school are not consistently documented in the IEP. When students do receive extended school year services, documentation of program description, beginning and ending dates, goals and objectives and frequency and location is inconsistent. When extended school is considered and it is determined the student does not require extended school year, the factors considered in the decision making process are not consistently documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that extended school year services are discussed for every student with an IEP and that the required documentation is included in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students are given the opportunity for extended school year when determined appropriate by the IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Related Services (Counseling) - Information obtained through record review determined that counseling goals and objectives are not consistently documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure counseling goals and objectives are included in the IEPs of students whose IEPs state that they will receive counseling. Implementation of these activities will ensure that counseling is related to students' needs as determined by the IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluation and notice of meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent (implementing without undue delay) and written notice. **The district did not submit an improvement plan for the area of consent/implementing without undue delay and is required to do so.** During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the area of written notice.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of direct parent referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, direct staff referrals, summer referrals, and health summary. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of summer referrals because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component. The plan must be revised to include these components.** During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the areas of health summary, referral process and direct staff referrals.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting timelines, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

Areas of Need:

Identification Meeting Timelines - Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that referral dates are not consistently documented for students eligible for speech and language services. As a result, twenty day timelines could not be verified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure referrals for speech and language services are dated and that identification meetings are conducted within twenty days of receipt all referrals. Implementation of these activities will ensure that there is no delay in the identification process. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Identification Meeting Participants - Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that general education teachers do not consistently attend identification meetings conducted for students referred for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a general education teacher is in attendance at identification meetings for students referred for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure staff members who have knowledge of the student's performance relative to the general education curriculum will be in attendance and provide input regarding the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, written reports, functional assessments and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, those evaluated for speech and language services, and those receiving bi-lingual evaluations. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, signature of agreement/disagreement and statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action 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 identified compliance in the areas of Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines and ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of required components including present level of educational performance, meeting participants, goals and objectives, and teacher knowledge. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in the areas of required components including present level of educational performance, goals and objectives, and teacher knowledge. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of meeting participants because the timeline identified in the self assessment has not been met. The plan must be revised to identify a revised timeline for compliance.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding reconvening meetings when there is a change to the IEP and meeting participants.

Areas of Need:

IEP Meetings – Information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that IEP meetings are not consistently convened with the required participants when changes are made to the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEP meetings are conducted when there is a change to the student's program and when the IEP is revised. Implementation of these activities will ensure decisions are made by the entire IEP team and that all decisions regarding programs, services and schedules are determined on the individual needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documenting decision making when determining the least restrictive environment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of supplemental aides and services, individual decision making, general education access, participation in extra curricular and non academic activities and continuum. During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring

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about correction in the areas of supplemental aides and services, general education access, participation in extra curricular and non academic activities and continuum. An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding individual decision making.

Area of Need:

Individual Decision Making - Information obtained through the interview process determined that when changes were made to existing IEPs, decisions regarding student programs were not made on an individual basis. The interview process also determined need for instruction in the in class support option for both science and social studies.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all decisions regarding students programs and schedules are determined by the individual needs of the students. Implementation of these activities will ensure decisions are made by the entire IEP team and that all decisions regarding programs, services and schedules are based on the individual needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings: The Elk Township School District serves students in grades preschool through grade six. Transition service needs and needed transition services requirements do not apply to the district.

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, notification to the case manager and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan and manifestation determination. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of IEP documentation.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation, alternative assessments and knowledge of assessments. During the on-site monitoring process it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings: The Elk Township School District serves students in grades preschool through grade six. High school graduation requirements do not apply to the district.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age range, class size, home instruction and group size for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of program descriptions, child study team and common planning time. The district's improvement is sufficient to address the area of common planning time. During the on-site monitoring process it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the area of program descriptions and child study team.

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 compliance in the areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of location of student records. During the on-site monitoring process it was determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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 Elk Township School District on December 21, 2004 and January 4 and 5, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

Two parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit although only one currently lives in the district. The local parent expressed satisfaction with the services provided. Eleven additional parents were contacted to obtain additional parent input. Some parents expressed overall satisfaction with the preschool transition process. Some parents did indicate concern regarding the need for additional supports provided for their children in the general education classroom.

Data indicate the district has increased the number of students who spend the majority of their school day in general education classrooms. Data also indicate that the district's classification rate is slightly above the state average. The district's improvement plan includes activities to address this area.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies, procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, notice of meeting, direct parent referrals, multi-disciplinary assessments, written reports, functional assessments, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, reevaluations conducted by June 30, meeting participants, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signature of agreement and disagreement, Core Curriculum Content Standards, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, documentation of consideration of the least restrictive environment, preschool transition, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, notification to the case manager, interim alternative educational setting, statewide assessment documentation in the IEP, age range, class size, home instruction, group size for speech, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of location of other records,

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development parent training, provision of related services, consent (implementing without undue delay), written notice, direct staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, standardized assessments, bi-lingual evaluations, provision of evaluation reports to parents, supplemental aides and services, individual decision making, general education access, continuum, participation in extra curricular activities, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, participation in statewide assessment, alternative assessments, knowledge of assessments, program descriptions, child study team, common planning time and knowledge of policies.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding transfer students, extended school year, related service goals and objectives, meetings, identification meeting timelines, hearing screenings, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, reconvening IEP meetings, IEP meeting participants, individual decision making and documentation of location of other records.

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