

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

District: Elmer Borough School District

County: Salem

Monitoring Dates: October 14, 2004 and November 16, 2004

Monitoring Team: Ken Richards and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Elmer Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Elmer Borough School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Elmer Borough 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 combined focus group meeting for parents and community members from both Elmer Borough School District and Pittsgrove Township School District, at the Arthur P. Schalick High School on the evening of October 14, 2004. Pittsgrove Township School District provides child study team services to the Elmer Borough School District and also was participating in the state monitoring process. Approximately fifteen parents and staff members from both districts were in attendance. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities.

During the on-site visit, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, district superintendent/building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Data Summary:

The Elmer Borough School District educates students from preschool through fourth grade with a population of 76 students in the school. Of those 76 students, 6 are eligible for special education. Three of these students attend Elmer Elementary School and are included in general education classes more than 80% of the school day. The students receive special education services through in-class support and pull-out replacement resource programs. The remaining three students attend programs in the Pittsgrove Township School District.

District Strengths:

The Elmer Borough School District is a small student centered school district with a strong commitment to the community. The district is commended for developing a variety of unique programs with the Appel Farm Arts and Music Center in Elmer. These programs provide opportunities for both special and general education students to participate in and benefit from the creative arts. Some students performed in the musical "On the Other Side of the Fence" at The Children's Music Network National Conference. The musical deals with the acceptance of individual differences and was created to bring together students with disabilities and their peers. As part of the Elmer Elementary School Mosaic Mural Project, students, families, community members, and staff from Appel Farm Arts & Music Center made small mosaics which were combined into a mosaic mural which is now located in the main lobby of the school. The mosaic depicts the borough of Elmer. In addition to learning to express their creativity, all students gained a better understanding of Elmer's history.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment (ASK 3, ASK 4), and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, provision of related services (speech & counseling), and maintenance of hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, and written notice for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of surrogate parent and notice of a meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of written notice for ESLS students because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure written notice is consistently provided to parents and includes all required components. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of Child Find (elementary age level), referral process, pre-referral interventions, and timelines for conducting identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding identification meeting participants for preschool children. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings, and health summary.

Areas of Need:

Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are not consistently conducted prior to the identification meeting conducted as a result of a direct parental referral.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are conducted prior to identification meetings and provided to the child study team. Implementation of these activities will ensure information is available at the time of the identification meeting to determine the need for an evaluation and, if needed, the assessments that will be conducted to determine eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of eligible for special education and related services multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of dating reports prepared by child study team members. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement the improvement plan in this area and has resulted in corrective action.

The district identified additional concerns in the areas of evaluations, functional assessments and written reports for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure all required components of the speech evaluation have been conducted and documented in the final report. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of eligibility meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents and signature of agreement – disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting, criteria, statement of eligibility and copy of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of meetings, criteria and reports to parents because it lacks a sufficient administrative oversight component to ensure activities bring about correction. The plan must be revised to include this component.** The district also identified concern in the area of statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, meeting participants, annual review, 90 day timelines, implementation dates, teacher

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

access and knowledge and annual reviews completed by June thirtieth for preschoolers in their last year in the preschool program.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of required components for IEPs, and Present Level of Education Performance (PLEP). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of school age and preschool age individual decision making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aides and services, general education access, and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in extra curricular and non-academic activities by students receiving services in out of district placements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

As Elmer Borough is a K-4 district, there are no findings in this area.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of access sheets, and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access of student records and documentation of location of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Elmer Borough School District on November 16, 2004. 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 Elmer Borough School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify virtually all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. The district is further commended for the many innovative and inclusive programs provided for students.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Approximately fifteen people attended the meeting, including parents, and staff members. Parents gave positive input regarding the provision of special education programs and services. In addition, feedback was positive regarding the level of communication and collaboration between teaching staff, child study team members, and parents.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the number of students placed in general education settings over the last few years, which is reflective of the district's commitment to inclusion.

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Programs and Services were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications, consent, meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find (elementary age level), referral process, pre-referral interventions, timelines for conducting identification meetings, eligible for special education and related services multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports, eligibility meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents, signature of agreement/disagreement of eligibility, IEP meetings, meeting participants, annual review, 90 day timelines, implementation dates, teacher access, knowledge and annual reviews completed by June thirtieth for preschoolers in their last year in the preschool program, school age and preschool age individual decision making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aides and services, general education access, continuum, access sheets, and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, provision of related services (speech & counseling), maintenance of hearing aides, surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, written notice for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS), identification meeting participants for preschool children, dating reports prepared by child study team members, meeting, criteria, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for speech and language services, required components for IEPs, Present Level of

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

Education Performance (PLEP), participation in extra curriculum and non academic activities by students receiving services in out of district placements, access of student records, and documentation of location of other records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need regarding vision and hearing screenings, and health summary.

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