

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

District: Emerson School District **County:** Bergen
Monitoring Date: May 27, 2004
Monitors: Susan Wilson, Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2002-2003 school year, the Emerson School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Emerson School District with an opportunity to evaluate its 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 its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Emerson School District developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

As the first step in verifying the self-assessment findings, in assessing the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and in determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Emerson Jr/Sr. High School Technology Center on the evening of April 28, 2004. Information obtained from this meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a comprehensive desk audit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information, and conducted further parent interviews by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, warranting only minor revision, which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

District Strengths:

The Emerson School District is commended for providing a Transitional Kindergarten program for their classified kindergarten students. The program provides the students with opportunities to be included in a general education kindergarten classroom for half of the school day with either a special education teacher or an instructional aide. Enrollment is limited to approximately 10-12 students and includes in- and out-of-district students. The

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

benefits of this program have allowed these students to successfully progress into a general education first grade class.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Emerson School District's classification rate of students requiring special educational programming and services has been under the state average of 13.4%: 2000 - 11.2%, 2001 - 12.0% and 2002 12.8%. The district reported it has made improvements in the Intervention and Referral Service (I&RS) process as well as expanded its general educational resources and programming to ensure only those students who are disabled are classified. In 2002, the Emerson School District increased the number of students with disabilities who are educated in regular education settings with appropriate supplementary aids and services from 94 to 103 students. This reflects a 77.4% rate that is well above the state's average of 41.6%.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of in-service training for professional, paraprofessional staff and parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, length of school day and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of programs and related services, frequency, duration and location of related services, transfer students, hearing aid policy, and certifications. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of transfer students, certification and hearing aid policy.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, parental and student participation at meetings, written notices, notices in native language, and interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of surrogate parents, for areas of consent, notices of meetings, and meetings.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find 3-21 and direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, timelines and participants. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of identification meeting timelines and participants, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and the referral process.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of standardized assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of planning meeting and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and turning age five. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of planning meetings.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement rationale and provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of signature of agreement or disagreement and rationale.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting/participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the decision-making process, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aids and services, notification and participation in out-of-district nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, and student invitation; age sixteen needed transition services and student/agency invitation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of age fourteen transition services needs and age sixteen needed transition services.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, convening an IEP team meeting for removals of ten or more school days, behavioral intervention plans (BIP) and functional behavioral assessments (FBA) manifestation determination, and interim alternative

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

educational settings (IAES). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP documentation and approved accommodation and modifications.

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified them compliant in the area of IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of outof-district- participation, written notice of graduation and diploma. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers and age range waivers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time and common planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the Emerson School District on May 27, 2004. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 its exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the areas identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of data indicated Emerson School District has increased the number and percentages of students with disabilities who are educated in regular education settings with appropriate supplementary aids and services. Improvements in the effectiveness of the Intervention and Referral Service (I&RS) process as well as expanded general educational resources and programming have served to effectively address the needs of at-risk students.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the districts programs and services. Parents expressed the need for parent training on special education issues and programs. Many of the other concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had been previously identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day, facilities, Child Find 3-21, direct referrals, standardized assessment, identification planning meeting participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, present age of majority, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, process for exemption from passing, class size waivers, and age range waivers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding inservice training for professional, paraprofessional staff and parents, provision of programs and related services, transfer students, certifications, hearing aides, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, parental and student participation at meetings, written notices, notices in native language, and interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and meetings, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, timelines and participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meeting participants, turning age five, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting and participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, IEPs to parents, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and access, decision-making process, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aides and services, regular education access, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, preschool transition

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

planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled program by age 3, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, age 16 needed transition services, student and agency invitation, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, convening an IEP team meeting for removals of ten or more school days, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, alternative assessment, participation of out-of-district students in their graduation, written notice of graduation, consultation time, group sizes for speech, home instruction, staff vacancies, common planning time, adult and student access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.