

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

District: Essex Fells School District

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: May 15, 2006

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky, Robert Schweitzer

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Essex Fells School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Essex Fells 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 Essex Fells School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

During the onsite visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team conducted phone interviews with a sampling of parents of special education students; conducted a comprehensive review of student files and district policies and procedures; and interviewed the superintendent and coordinator of special services. These activities were conducted to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan and to determine the district's progress in implementing the plan. It was determined during monitoring that the district has developed and implemented an improvement plan that addresses all areas identified during the self-assessment. As a result, all areas were determined to be compliant.

Data Summary:

The Essex Fells School District serves students preschool age through grade 6. A review of the district's data indicated classification rates of 11.3% for 2001, 12.2% for 2002, 11.3% for 2003, and 11.8% for both 2004 and 2005. These rates were below the state rates for all five years. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district placed 84.4% (27 out of 32 students) of their students with disabilities, ages 6-12, in general education programs for more than 80% of the day with appropriate supplementary aids and services. For that same year, two students (9.4%) were placed in general education programs between 40%-80% of the school day.

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At the preschool level, during 2005-2006, the district placed 100% (6) of their preschool students with disabilities into a general education setting for either all or part of their program. The self-assessment indicates that the district has instituted a professional development plan for general and special education teachers and staff. The district instituted this initiative to educate staff at all levels regarding the in-class support model and the use of differentiated instruction. As a result, the district is able to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in general education programs with their non-disabled peers.

Sections Not Reviewed

Transition to Adult Life and Graduation are sections of the self-assessment that were not reviewed by the NJDOE because the district does not serve a population of students to whom these requirements apply.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The onsite monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- **General Provisions**
- **Free, Appropriate Public Education**
- **Procedural Safeguards**
- **Evaluation**
- **Reevaluation**
- **Least Restrictive Environment**
- **Transition to Preschool**
- **Discipline**
- **Statewide Assessment**
- **Programs and Services**

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. Each area was reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). The areas listed below were compliant for both groups.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral process • Direct referrals • Identification meeting timelines • Identification meeting participants
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Eligibility criteria • Copy of evaluation reports to parents
Individualized Education Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Implementation dates

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
(IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP provided to parent prior to implementation • Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP • Annual reviews completed by June 30 • 90-day timelines

Areas of Noncompliance - Compliance Review

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee as noncompliant. Each area was reviewed for students eligible for ESERS and ESLs. It was determined that the accompanying improvement plan has been implemented for each area with an administrative oversight mechanism in place to ensure ongoing compliance. As a result, the district has demonstrated compliance in all of the following areas.

Section	Corrected Areas
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	Child Find - Activities were not sufficient to reach migrant and/or homeless students.
Eligibility	Signatures of agreement or disagreement with written rationale – Child study team members who assessed students as part of an initial evaluation did not document agreement or disagreement with the eligibility decision.
IEP	Teacher knowledge and access to IEPs – Teachers were not consistently informed of their responsibilities to implement students' IEPs.

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Summary

Special education monitoring was conducted in the Essex Fells School District on May 15, 2006. The purpose 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and implement an improvement plan that corrected all noncompliance.

A review of the Essex Fells School District's data indicates classification rates of 11.3% for 2001, 12.2% for 2002, 11.3% for 2003, and 11.8% for both 2004 and 2005. This demonstrates that the district has been able to maintain a consistent classification rate that remained below the state average during those years. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district placed 100% of the six preschool students with disabilities into either a part-time early childhood setting or a part time early childhood special educational setting. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district has placed (84.4%) 27 out of 32 students with disabilities ages 6-12 in general education programs for more than 80% of the day with appropriate supplementary aids and services. For that same year, two students (9.4%) were placed in general education programs between 40%-80% of the school day. The self-assessment indicates that the district has instituted a professional development plan for general and special education teachers and staff. The district instituted this initiative to educate staff at all levels regarding the in-class support model and the use of differentiated instruction. As a result, the district is able to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in general education programs with their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, the district's staff has adopted a variety of programs to address reading problems. These programs provide more opportunities for students with disabilities to develop skills needed to progress in the general education curriculum and remain in general education classes.

Of the parents who were interviewed and participated in the parent survey, all expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and their communication with staff.

Sections identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- General Provisions
- Free, Appropriate Public Education
- Procedural Safeguards
- Evaluation
- Reevaluation
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Programs and Services

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- Referral process
- Pre-referral interventions
- Direct referrals
- Health summary
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Identification meeting timelines
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents
- IEP meeting participants
- IEP required considerations and components
- Implementation dates
- Meetings held annually, or more

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- Identification meeting participants
 - Eligibility meeting participants
 - Eligibility criteria
 - Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability
- often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP
 - Annual reviews completed by June 30th
 - IEP provided to parent prior to implementation
 - 90-day timelines

Areas of need that were originally identified by the district during self-assessment as non-compliant, but were found to be compliant by the NJDOE during the onsite monitoring included:

- Child Find
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale
- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)

No additional areas of noncompliance were identified within the various sections during the onsite monitoring. Additionally, it was determined that the district has corrected all self-identified areas of noncompliance and has established administrative oversight activities to ensure ongoing compliance. As a result, it was determined that the Essex Fells School District has demonstrated compliance in all areas.