

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

District: Evesham Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: December 10, 11, 12, and 13, 2001

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin, Jane Marano, Ken Richards, and Catherine Thomas

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Evesham Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self- assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Evesham Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate its 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 Evesham Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Marlton Middle School on December 3, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and parents.

District Strengths:

The district has made a commitment to provide an ongoing system of staff development utilizing a study group structure. These study groups assist staff members in implementing curricular and instructional innovations, collaboratively plan for school improvement, and study current research on teaching and learning. Topics of study vary

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for each group, with many incorporating special education and inclusion goals. These study groups offer staff members the opportunity to share their own research as well as identifying areas where additional training is needed. A mechanism for follow-up and evaluation of the effectiveness of these efforts is an integral part of the process.

The district offers two school-wide programs funded through the Evesham Education Foundation, a non-profit organization formed to enhance and enrich the academic experience for all students in Evesham Township. The CAPPS program is a summer program for at-risk kindergarten students, providing 4-6 weeks of instruction in music, art, creative dramatics, and physical education. The Genesis Counseling program utilizes trained counselors from outside agencies to work with identified "high risk" students at the elementary and middle school level with substance abuse or other problems on a crisis or an as-needed basis. Both of these programs are open to both disabled and non-disabled students.

The district operates the Metamorphosis program for students transitioning from sixth to seventh grade. The program operates during the summer months and provides activities designed to help students develop better communication skills, improve peer relationships and interactions in a group setting, and develop a positive self-image. Students are recommended by school staff and may include disabled and/or non-disabled students.

The district has made a commitment to providing necessary assistive technology for disabled students. Currently, there are five classrooms at Jaggard School with infrared looping for sound amplification. There are plans to expand this concept to other classrooms in the district.

The district operates a preschool disabled class based on a strong collaborative and integrative model, including considerable therapeutic support. Teachers have been responsive to parent needs throughout the school year, especially with training and development. At the focus group meeting, parents of students in the program echoed their approval of the program and staff.

The district has made a commitment to limiting the age range for self-contained classrooms to two years. Many of the classes contain a single grade level, affording students the opportunity to more closely identify themselves with their regular education grade appropriate peer groups. In addition, the pupil to staff ratio in the multiply disabled programs is lower than that required by code, allowing greater adaptations in delivery of instruction to accommodate special needs.

The district should be commended for its commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities. It was observed during the on-site visit that this commitment extends from the highest level of district administration to instructional and support staff.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the district

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during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of speech, OT and PT services, length of school day and year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and transfer procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding counseling.

Area of Need:

Counseling – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff members and a review of student records indicates that the district does not consistently consider the need for counseling as a related service for those students who may require it. Students are usually offered the opportunity to access crisis intervention services on an “as needed” basis. Staff members indicate a need for more systematic, regular, and therapeutic services. For students who do have counseling identified as a related service, personnel providing the service do not consistently maintain documentation of the provision of services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that counseling as a related service is considered for those students who may require this service. The plan must include a mechanism to further ensure related service providers are documenting the provision of services. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of meeting notices for IEP meetings and transition. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding native language, meeting participants, and provision of required code documents.

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Areas of Need:

Native Language – During the on-site visit, interviews with district staff members indicate that procedures are established for making contact to agencies for the purpose of translating written notice into native language when required. A review of student files, however, indicates that copies of these translated notices are not consistently maintained in pupil records. In addition, the district has procedures in place to contract with agencies to provide translators for parent meetings. A review of documentation of participation indicates that the participation of these individuals is not consistently maintained.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that documentation of the provision of written notice in native language is maintained on a consistent basis. The plan must further include a mechanism to document the participation of translators at meetings. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff members and a review of student files indicates that regular education teachers are not consistently in attendance at meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers are in attendance at meetings for preschool students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Code Documents – During the on-site visit, interviews with district personnel indicate that the district does not provide a copy of the due process hearing rules when required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a copy of the due process hearing rules is provided to parents when required. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, and health summaries.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants

Areas of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screenings – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicates that information regarding vision and hearing screenings is not consistently available at the time of the identification meeting. Instead, it is provided subsequent to the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that vision and hearing screening information is provided prior to the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, interviews with district personnel indicate that though the required child study team members attend identification meetings, that participation is not consistently documented in the student record.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of the attendance of meeting participants in the student record. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, use of standardized assessments, functional assessments, components of reports for child study team evaluations, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of initial evaluation timelines (90 days). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech and language evaluations and documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports.

Areas of Need:

Speech and Language Evaluations - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of speech and language records and staff interviews indicated that the speech and language specialists do not consistently complete the following functional assessments: observations in other than a testing setting; developmental and educational history; interventions attempted; and informal measures.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech-language evaluation reports include the required components of functional assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Documentation of Acceptance and Rejection of Reports - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records indicated the district does not consistently document the acceptance or rejection of reports even though the district has procedures to do so.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include an administrative oversight component to ensure existing procedures for documenting acceptance or rejection of evaluation reports are consistently implemented.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of re-evaluation planning meetings, meeting participants, and re-evaluation of students turning school age.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria for determining eligibility, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, IEP components, goals and objectives aligned to the CCCSs, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of informing teachers of IEP content and reports of progress on goals and objectives. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding speech-language IEPs, duration of services, and procedures for revising IEPs.

Areas of Need:

Speech-Language IEPs – During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs for students eligible for speech-language services indicates that the following considerations are not consistently documented: the strengths of the student; parental concerns; and results of the most recent evaluation. In addition, IEP goals and objectives are not related to the CCCSs. Interviews with district personnel indicate that the district is in the process of addressing this issue, however, it was not identified during self-assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech-language IEPs contain all the required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Duration of Services – During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs indicated that descriptions of speech-language and OT services do not consistently identify the duration of sessions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs identify the duration of related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

IEP Revisions – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with school personnel indicate that the district does not consistently convene an IEP meeting prior to revising the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEP meetings are convened to revise the IEP and that parents are provided with appropriate written notice within 15 days of the meeting prior to implementing any proposed changes. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, provision of supplementary aids and services and access to regular education programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum of services for students with behavior disabilities and consideration of regular education as a first placement option for preschool students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section X: Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student and agency invitation to meetings, documentation of agency involvement, statements of transition service needs, and statements of needed transition services.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of student interests and preferences.

Areas of Need:

Student Interests and Preferences – During the on-site visit, interviews with district personnel indicate that the only time students are afforded the opportunity to discuss their interests and preferences is when they are interviewed at IEP meetings. There are no procedures in place to obtain this information if students do not attend the meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure student interest and preferences are assessed prior to the IEP meeting where transition will be discussed to ensure courses of study are connected to those interests and preferences. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

Although this district serves grades K-8 only, students exiting grade 8 are provided with the opportunity to participate in graduation exercises. The district accurately assessed compliance in this area.

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Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, documenting access to pupil records, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding access to confidential folders and documentation of other locations of records.

Area of Need:

Access Sheets - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of pupil records indicated that files for students classified as eligible for speech-language services did not contain access sheets.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech-language files contain record access sheets. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Documentation of Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of central files indicated the district does not identify the locations of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the locations of other student records maintained by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Evesham Township School District on December 10, 11, 12, and 13, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. In addition, 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 its many unique and beneficial programs and its strong philosophical commitment to inclusion.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process, including extended school year and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included professional and parent development, preschool transition, procedures regarding discipline and statewide assessment, provision of IEP programs and services, length of school day and year, facilities, certification, parental consent, provision of written notice, independent evaluations, eligibility, individualized decision-making, access to regular education programs, and procedures for destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, transfer procedures, notice of a meeting, evaluation and reevaluation timelines, provision of evaluation reports to parents, teacher knowledge of responsibilities regarding IEPs, reporting progress to parents, and consideration of regular education programs for preschool.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding counseling as a related service, native language, participants for preschool and identification meetings, vision and hearing screenings, speech and language evaluations and IEPs, revisions to IEPs, documentation of student interests and preferences, and student record issues.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.