

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

District: Fair Lawn **County:** Bergen

Monitoring Dates: January 13 and 14, 2005

Monitor: Gladys Miller, Susan Wilson and Ann Marie Bruder

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the **Fair Lawn School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Fair Lawn 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 **Fair Lawn 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 the **Thomas Jefferson Middle School Auditorium** on the evening of December 16, 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. The team also conducted parent interviews by interviewing members of the Special Education Parents Association while in district. As part of the comprehensive desk audit, child study team members were also interviewed. 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 Fair Lawn School District is commended for the expansion of their district special education programs to include students with behavioral disabilities, autism and specific learning disabilities. The district reported that this year sixty students were brought back from separate placements outside of the district to be educated in district programs with their peers. In order to support these students, the district's family model was

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

initiated at all levels as well as the expansion of the FLEX program which supports students with more significant behavioral and academic issues in both general and special education classes. The Stepping Stones program, which supports students with autism, was also expanded to serve more students within the district.

The district is further commended for the development of a program to address individual student needs related to performance on the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). According to information provided by the district, student progress was documented by achieving safe harbor status which means that schools that did not meet the state threshold for performance achieved equal to or more than a 10% decrease in the number of students scoring partially proficient over two years.

The district is commended for providing support to the special education parent group known as the Fair Lawn Association of Special Education (FLASE). This organization holds monthly meetings and provides the membership of one hundred to one hundred and fifty parents and staff in-service on a variety of issues.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Fair Lawn School District's classification rate of students requiring special education programming and services (excluding eligible for speech and language services) has been at or near the state average. Furthermore, for students age 6-21, the district's trend over the past three years has been to place 69%-70% of the special education students in the general educational setting for more than 80% of the day. This is significantly above the state average of 41.6%. The district has also expanded its preschool options by offering in district programs students with autism. The district also provides all students in their preschool program with the opportunity to be included with their non-disabled peers by hosting two community programs in the facility.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Transition to Pre-School and Statewide Assessment 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 accurately identified compliance in the areas of facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of changes in programs, related services of occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and counseling goals and objectives, length of school day and year, transfer students and hearing aid procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding extended school year.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interview that extended school year is not consistently considered for all students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year services are consistently considered during IEP meetings and provided when appropriate. The plan must include a mechanism to document the factor(s) considered. Implementation of these activities will ensure that extended school year services are available to all students who require them. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings and written notices. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Participants at Identification Meetings, Reevaluation Meetings, Eligibility Meetings and IEP Meetings- During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the required participants are not always present at meetings. Further, there is no documentation of who attended identification meetings as there is no signature page.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required participants attend meetings and that documentation of participation is maintained in pupil records. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents can ask questions of the professional staff and understand how their child's needs impact educational performance. In addition, decisions will be made based on the input of all required participants. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding identification meeting participants. (See Section III)

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary, functional assessments, written reports and acceptance and or rejection of outside 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.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 3 year timelines and changes in eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding reevaluation planning meeting participants. (See Section III)

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and or disagreement and providing a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at eligibility meetings. (See Section III)

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, implementation dates, IEPs to parents and ninety day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of input from vocational personnel, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding IEP meeting participants. (See Section III)

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and notification of and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. 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 X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, and agency involvement and age 16 needed transition services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and interview that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedural safeguards, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination, and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager and behavior intervention plan. 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 XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP requirements of attendance, credit hours, High School Proficiency Assessment, local requirements, and out of district participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written notice of graduation. 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.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding consultation time and case management. 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 XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of parent and adult-student access to records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

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 **Fair Lawn School District** on January 13 and 14, 2005. 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of data indicated the district has maintained a classification rate of students requiring special educational programming and services (excluding eligible for speech and language services) at or near the state average. Furthermore, for students ages 6-21, the district's trend over the past three years has been to place approximately 70% percentage of special education students in the general educational setting for more than 80% of the day. The district has consistently provided opportunities for the majority of students with disabilities to be educated in the general education curriculum with typical peers.

At a public focus group meeting attended by approximately twenty parents, attendees expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Additionally, members of the Fair Lawn Association of Special Education (FLASE), Fair Lawn's parent support group were interviewed. Parents commented positively on the recent appointment of the transition coordinator and noted the progress the district has made in this area. However, parents did share concerns regarding the provision of extended school year services and in-service needs of general and special education staff. Some parents felt that they would like the child study team to present more program options to them. Many concerns raised by parents were identified during the self-assessment and the district has developed an improvement plan to address these areas of need. Further, a need to increase parental satisfaction with district special education programs was identified by the district and an improvement plan was developed to address parent needs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the focus group meeting, additional parent and staff interviews and comprehensive desk audit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, professional and parent development, facilities, certifications, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, IEP meeting, implementation dates, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, continuum of programs, pre-school transition planning conference, early intervention to pre-school by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, out of district participation, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access and requests for records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding changes in programs, provision of related services, length of day and year, transfer students, hearing aid procedures, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, acceptance and or rejection of outside reports, reevaluation timelines, changes in eligibility, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and or disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, IEP considerations and required statements, input from vocational personnel, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision making process, documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district, notification and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services, student and agency invite, discipline documentation to case manager, behavior intervention plan, written notice of graduation, consultation time and time for case management.

The focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding extended school year and participants at meetings.

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