

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

District: Fairfield School District

County: Cumberland

Monitoring Dates: February 3, 4, 5, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Arlene Popovici

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Fairfield School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Fairfield 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 Fairfield School 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 focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Fairfield Primary School on February 4, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, 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 administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district has developed an after school program called Homework Haven. This program provides a quiet place for students to complete homework with support from teachers. Presently there are eight teachers in each school who participate in this program. All students, including students with disabilities, are included and transportation is provided.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Student Records 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding professional and parent development and dissemination of IDEA information.

Area(s) of Need:

Professional and Parent Development – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff identified a need for training opportunities for special education and regular education teachers. In addition, interviews with parents and staff members identified a need for more parent training opportunities. Though training opportunities had been available in previous years, none are available this year because the child study team (CST) was dissolved and services are now being provided through the Salem County Special Services School District. Additionally, district administrators were terminated, leaving the district in a state of transition. As such, a needs assessment of training topics has not yet been identified by the current staff, both clinical and administrative.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that special education staff, regular education staff and parents receive in-service training related to special education and the instruction of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The plan must include a mechanism to determine staff and parent needs regarding these in-service needs, as well as a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of these training opportunities. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Dissemination of IDEA information – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that the district does not have a procedure to make available to parents information regarding the district's eligibility under Part B of IDEA.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that upon receipt of a parental request, parents are provided with access to documents related to the district's eligibility under Part B of IDEA. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and transfer students.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff and parents indicated that although there is an extended school year section in the district's IEP format, extended school year is not considered for any student in the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is considered for all students and provided when it is determined to be necessary to address student needs. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Transfer Students – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that when a student transfers into the district the team does not consistently conduct an immediate review of the evaluation information and the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the team conducts an immediate review of the evaluation information and the IEP, and that students are placed in appropriate programs in a timely manner. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and 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 themselves compliant in the area of independent evaluations. Additionally, the district indicated that they recently adopted the model notice forms developed by OSEP. A review of files indicated team members employed through the Salem County Special Services School District are implementing them appropriately.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address surrogate parents because it lacks in-service training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training to ensure the consistent**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

implementation of the procedure. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants for students eligible for special education and related service. The areas of consent, notice of meetings, written notice and distribution of a current copy of PRISE and notice in native language were identified for students eligible for speech and language services. **Because oversight activities are conducted by building principals who have no knowledge of special education regulations, numerous procedural issues have been identified regarding noncompliance with special education regulations as they pertain to students who are or may be eligible for speech and language services.**

Area(s) of Need:

Participants- During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that regular education and special education teachers do not consistently attend meetings when required. District staff identified coverage issues as barriers to compliance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education and special education teachers are in attendance at meetings when required. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Consent for Students Eligible for Speech-Language Services- During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that consent is not consistently obtained for initial evaluations. In addition, meetings are not consistently held to discuss referrals for speech services. Instead, a form letter is sent home asking the parent to sign consent to evaluate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that meetings are conducted with required participants to review existing data to determine the need for an evaluation. The plan must ensure parents have the opportunity to grant or deny consent as a result of that meeting. The plan must also include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan must identify an administrator(s) who is knowledgeable about special education regulations to oversee the implementation of these procedures.**

Notice of Meeting and Written Notice – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that notice of meeting and written notice for students eligible for speech-language services do not contain all the required components. Notice of a meeting does not include a statement of the parent's right to bring other persons to the meeting when the purpose of the meeting is to develop, review and or revise the IEP. Written notice of the nature and scope of the evaluation determined the following components to be missing: an explanation of why the district is taking such action; a description of procedures, records or reports and factors considered in making this determination; a description of other options, other than

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

evaluation, discussed and the reason why they were rejected and description of other factors relevant to the proposed action.

- **The district will revise their notices for students eligible for speech and language services to ensure they contain all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Notice in Native Language – During the on-site monitoring though child study team members indicated they have interpreters at meetings and provide notice in the parent's native language, a review of records failed to indicate that this was done on a consistent basis. Additionally, based on a record review of speech files and interviews with the speech language therapist, it was determined interpreters are not used and notices in native language are not provided, even when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure interpreters are used at meetings when necessary and notice is provided in the parent's native language, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Parental Rights In Special Education – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated parents of students eligible for speech-language services are not provided with a current copy of PRISE.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that current copies of PRISE are provided to parents. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals from parents and timelines.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find, direct referrals from teachers, speech referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that the district does not conduct any Child Find activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities are implemented for children residing in the community between the ages of 3-21 as well as those children who are migrant and/or homeless. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Pre-Referral Process – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that teachers are only able to make referrals to the Fairfield Action Committee Team from November to March even though students are experiencing behavioral and/or academic difficulties from the beginning of the school year. As a result, these difficulties are not addressed in a timely manner and are frequently exacerbated by the delay.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that teachers are able to refer students to the Fairfield Action Committee Team throughout the school year. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Direct Referrals – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that teachers are not able to make a direct referral to the Child Study Team. All referrals must go through the Fairfield Action Committee Team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that staff has the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the Fairfield Action Committee Team. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Language Referrals – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that when a student is referred for articulation issues, and that during the evaluation process the speech language therapist identifies language based issues, the student is not immediately referred to the child study team because she does not have the authority to do that. Instead, the student is referred to the Fairfield Action Committee Team by the classroom teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the speech language specialist has the authority to refer students directly to the Child Study Team when language issues are identified prior to the determination of eligibility. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Health Summaries and Vision/Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are not conducted in a timely manner.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is referred to the child study team the school nurse summarizes available health and medical information on the student, conducts vision and hearing screenings, and provides this information to the child study team by the time of the identification meeting. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness to the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments and accept/rejection of reports.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and speech/language written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments for Speech – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicate that speech language evaluations do not consistently include a parent interview, teacher interviews, student observation, and a written educational impact statement from the classroom teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language evaluations include all the required components of a functional assessment. The plan must include in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Bilingual Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that child study team members and the speech/language specialist are not conducting bilingual evaluations for students who require them. Additionally, it was determined that though there are students who require English as a second language and/or bilingual services, because none are available in the district, they are not receiving these required services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure bilingual evaluations are conducted for those students who require them. The plan must also include procedures to determine the need for bilingual services in the district, and a mechanism to provide those services when needed. The plan must further include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness to the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation to the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that although the speech therapist indicated she conducted speech evaluations using appropriate

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

standardized assessment tools, a review of written reports failed to verify that. Instead, the reports simply indicated the student was eligible for services. Additionally, because these reports contained no assessment results, it could not be determined how eligibility was being determined.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the speech/language therapist conducts appropriate evaluations and develops reports that include all required components to further ensure eligibility determinations are based on mandated criteria. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three year timelines.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluations for students eligible for speech-language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluations – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with the speech-language specialist indicated that reevaluations are not conducted for students eligible for speech/language services prior to their declassification from therapy. Declassifications occur at the time of the annual review without conducting a reevaluation planning meeting to review existing data or to determine the need for additional assessments to determine the appropriate eligibility status.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are conducted prior to determining a student is no longer eligible for services. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations and the statement of eligibility.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech/language services (addressed in Section V) and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Copy of Evaluation Reports to Parents – During the on-site monitoring, record review and staff interviews indicated the district is not providing evaluation reports 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents at least 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements for students eligible for special education and related services, present levels of educational performance statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents and 90- day timelines for students eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, considerations/required statements and provision of services prior to implementation of IEP for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Considerations/Required Statements – During the on-site monitoring, review of the speech IEP format indicated that all required components of the IEP are not included.

- **The district will revise its IEP format to include all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the speech IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Goals and Objectives Aligned with Core Curricular Content Standards – During the on-site monitoring, it was indicated that because the district does not have a district wide curriculum in any subject area, it cannot be determined whether students are being instructed in areas that would at least meet the minimum standards established in the core curriculum content standards.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the development of a district wide curriculum that at least meets the minimum standards established in the core curriculum content standards. The plan must also include a mechanism to align goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards once the district wide curriculum is developed. The plan must further include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Provision of Speech-Language IEP – During the on-site monitoring, a review of speech IEPs indicated students are receiving speech/language services prior to the development of the IEP and without obtaining parental consent.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure an IEP is developed, written notice is provided and parental consent is obtained prior to the [provision of speech/language services. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness to the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti statements, consideration of supplemental aids and services and regular education access in district.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the decision-making process, continuum issues at the elementary level and the notification/participation of students in out-of-district placements in nonacademic and extracurricular activities offered within the district.

Area(s) of Need:

Continuum/Decision-Making Process – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that because the elementary schools do not have pull-out resource center programs, the individual needs of students are not being addressed. In an attempt to address the needs of these students, in-class support teachers are instructing students who are not progressing in this resource center in-class support model, in small groups in the back of the regular education class, utilizing lower level instructional materials and providing replacement instruction.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it develops and provides programs that are needed to address the individual needs of students. The plan must include a needs assessment to determine the types of programs that are needed. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff indicated that students in out-of-districts placements are not notified of nonacademic and extracurricular activities offered within the district. As a result, these students are not participating in these activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students in out-of-district placements are notified of nonacademic and extracurricular activities to further ensure they have**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

the opportunity to participate in these activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Provision of Programs – During the on-site monitoring, record review and staff interviews indicated that the district’s team teaching model is being implemented in an inappropriate manner because both teachers are not assigned to the class all day. Instead, the special education teacher is assigned to other classes throughout the day as though the team teaching classes were in-class support classes.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that if the district wishes to provide services in a team teaching model, both teachers are assigned to the class full time and they instruct the same group of students throughout the day. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness to the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding all areas of discipline.

Area(s) of Need:

Lack of Discipline Procedures – During the on-site, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district does not have written procedures to implement discipline regulations, has not provided any training to staff regarding required discipline procedures, and at times, administrators have unilaterally removed students from their placements without involvement of the required members of the IEP team. As a result, students with disabilities are not receiving services when removed nor are team members conducting required procedures.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure discipline requirements are followed by all district staff members prior to removing students with disabilities from their programs. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age-range, group size for speech and consultation time.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding program descriptions and the implementation of the in-class support model and the team teaching model. These areas were addressed in Section IX.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Program Descriptions – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the district has not submitted program descriptions to the county office.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the district provides program descriptions to the county office of education.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Fairfield School District on February 3, 4, 5, 2003. 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. As a result of the district's review, they were able to identify some areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change.

The instructional staff members of the district are commended for their dedication to the students in the district as well as their abilities to provide services in spite of the numerous barriers they are encountering regarding the state of transition the district is currently in.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with inclusion programs and teacher availability. Parents expressed concerns with the transition of the new child study team and their availability. Parents also expressed concerns with the fact that the district does not presently have a curriculum.

Areas demonstrating compliance in all standards included Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, certifications, facilities, independent evaluations, direct referral from parents, timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, reevaluation timelines, accept/rejection of reports, agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations, statement of eligibility, teacher responsibility, Oberti statements, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures and surrogate parents.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding professional and parent development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, transfer students, participants, consent, notice of meeting, written notice, notice in native language, procedural safeguards, child find, referral process, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluations, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curricular content standards, provision of IEP, decision-making process, continuum, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, provision of programs, discipline and program descriptions.

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