

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

District: Fairfield Township School District

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: April 15 & April 21, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Fairfield Township 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 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 Fairfield Township School District 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 Adlai E. Stevenson School on April 21, 2004. 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

Data Summary:

The Fairfield Township School District provides special education and related services to 61 students in grades pre-K through 6, excluding students who only receive speech-language services. For the past three years the district has had an average classification rate, excluding students receiving only speech-language services, of 9.6% which is below the state average of 14.61%. 16% of classified students are placed in

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general education for more than 80% of the day and 61% are placed in general education for 40%-80% of the day, resulting in 77% of classified students in general education for at least 40% of the day. The district now operates an integrated preschool program on site and, as a result, the percentage of students with disabilities educated with typical peers has increased from 15% in 2002 to 31% in 2004.

District Strengths:

The Circle of Friends program was implemented in the kindergarten and fourth grade classes to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in those grades. The kindergarten students participated in discussions on similarities and differences in people, with emphasis on learning differences. The students also learned about various ways to communicate including the use of a communication board. The entire fourth grade class participated in the Circle of Friends program.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Free Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Location, Referral, Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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 VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of meeting participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of utilizing the severe discrepancy formula to determine eligibility. The improvement plan submitted by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

Area(s) of Need:

Agreement/Disagreement with Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that members of the child study team do not document agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations and, in the event of disagreement, provide a rationale for that disagreement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that at eligibility meetings child study team members document their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations. The inclusion of this component will ensure that district personnel have an opportunity to state in writing any dissent with team decisions. This also ensures that parents are fully informed of differing opinions regarding these eligibility**

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determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of IEP meeting participants, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of considerations and required statements. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, access to general education, notification to out of district students to extracurricular and/or nonacademic activities and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of placement in the least restrictive environment. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of access, access sheets and documentation of other locations of records.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding maintenance of student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Maintenance of Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that when a student is transitioning from the Fairfield Township School District to the receiving high school district that the entire student record is transferred. The Fairfield Township School District does not maintain copies of any portion of the student record with the exception of copies of the IEPs of exiting students which are destroyed following an audit the following year. N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d)

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states that mandated or permitted records required as part of programs established through state administered entitlement or discretionary funds from the U.S Department of Education must be maintained for a period of five years after completion of the program activities. The district must retain copies of the most current student IEPs and evaluations for a period of five years in order to demonstrate the provision of special education and related services

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures for the maintenance of student records. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Fairfield Township School District on April 15, 2005. 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.

Six parents attended the focus group meeting held on April 22, 2005. Parents were generally satisfied with the programs being provided to their students by the Fairfield Township School District. All the parents indicated that they are invited to IEP meetings, but the impression of their importance at those meetings varied. One parent indicated that she was a valuable member of the IEP team and that her input was considered when developing the IEP. Other parents felt the IEP team heard what was said at the meetings, but didn't take the information seriously in terms of developing the IEP. The parents indicated that budgetary issues were a barrier to accessing services, particularly out-of-district placements and one-to-one aides.

Areas identified as compliant with all standards included General Provisions, Free Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Location, Referral, Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included meeting participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, IEP meeting participants, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, access to general education, notification to out of district students of extracurricular and/or nonacademic activities and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding utilizing the severe discrepancy formula to determine eligibility, considerations and required statements and documentation of placement in the least restrictive environment.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding signatures of agreement/disagreement with eligibility and maintenance of student records.

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