

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

District: Flemington-Raritan Regional School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: March 14, 15, 2002

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Background Information

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Flemington Raritan Regional 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 Flemington-Raritan Regional 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 on February 19, 2002. 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 administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members (CST), and speech language therapists.

District Strength:

The district has implemented a unique program entitled "Understanding Differences: A Program on Sensitivity" to help students become sensitive to, and aware of other students with special needs. The program affords regular education students the opportunity to experience a variety of challenges facing students with disabilities. The

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program creates a climate of understanding that leads to kindness and a heightened sense of sensitivity.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Eligibility, Reevaluation, Discipline and Programs/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.

Area Demonstrating Noncompliance Resulting from Documentation Issues:

Although it has been determined that the district has appropriately implemented specific procedures, the following area is noncompliant because the district has inconsistently documented the activities.

Extended School Year – The district has inconsistently documented the discussions and considerations for extended school year.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it documents the activities it conducts to implement the specific required procedures identified in the above section. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Policy/Procedures and dissemination of public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding professional/parent development. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 transfer procedures, appropriate certification of staff, provision of related services and length of school day/year.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding counseling goals and objectives and facilities. The county office has been advised of the facilities issue.

Area of Need:

Counseling Goals/Objectives - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that counseling goals/objectives are inconsistently developed and included in IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that counseling goals/objectives are developed and incorporated into IEPs. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, surrogate parents, convening meetings, independent evaluations and the 15/20-day timelines.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding content/provision of district notices and native language.

Area(s) of Need:

Content/Provision of District Notices - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that district notices do not contain the required components and are not provided to parents within required timelines.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all district notices contain the required statements and components; are provided to parents in accordance with required timelines; and that the provision of notice is documented in files. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Native Language - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not provide notices in the native language of parent(s), when feasible.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure notices are provided in the native language of the parent, when feasible. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting/timelines and participants.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding child find.

Area of Need:

Child Find Outreach Activities - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district's Child Find activities do not include activities to identify migrant and homeless students who are potentially disabled.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities include migrant and homeless students who are potentially disabled. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports and written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that functional assessments do not include documentation of interventions attempted.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain all the required components. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Multi-disciplinary Evaluations for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that although evaluations developed by elementary level speech/language

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therapists contain documentation of the educational impact of the speech problem from the student's teacher, evaluations completed at the middle school level do not.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language evaluations developed at the middle school level include documentation of the educational impact of the speech problem from the student's teacher. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Acceptance/Rejection of Outside Reports - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not document acceptance or rejection of all or part(s) of the report with the provision of a rationale to the parent regarding any rejection.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the acceptance/rejection of all or part(s) of the report and provides a rationale for any rejection to the parent. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that written reports are not dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are dated. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP participants, goals/objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding teacher access/responsibility for the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the annual review process for students transitioning out of 8th grade and required components/considerations/statements of IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Review Process for Students Transitioning Out of 8th Grade - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that because district staff believe it is the responsibility

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of the high school district to complete the annual review process and provide written notice of the proposed program and services the students will receive in the high school district, the annual review process for outgoing 8th grade students is incorrect. As a result of this incorrect process, the district does not include all required components to the IEP (statement of transition service needs, graduation requirements, age of majority when needed, and goals and objectives), nor does it provide written notice of any proposed program/services for the following year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP team appropriately completes the annual review process for students transitioning out of 8th grade. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these procedures.**

Required Components, Considerations/Statements - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and CST interviews that IEPs for students eligible for speech/language services do not include extended school year, age of majority, supports for school personnel, modifications/supplementary aids and services in the regular education classroom and modifications required for participation in extracurricular/nonacademic activities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs for students eligible for speech/language services contain the required components, considerations/statements. The improvement plan must also include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, least restrictive environment statement, considerations/required statements, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum of programs.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the consideration/discussion of supplementary aids and services in the general education setting.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Supplementary Aids and Services – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the IEP team does not sufficiently document the supplementary aids and services that were considered and rejected or the

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reason they were not appropriate to meet the student's needs in the general education setting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the supplementary aids and services that were considered and rejected and why they were not appropriate to meet the student's needs in the general education setting. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student/agency invitation and agency linkages.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the statement of transition service needs. This issue was addressed in Section VIII.

Section X: Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition conferences and early intervention programs to a preschool disabilities program by age 3.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves complaint in the areas of student participation in statewide assessment, documentation of assessment within the IEP, and accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student participation in the alternate assessment process. The district has developed an improvement plan that is not sufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight mechanism to bring about the required changes. The improvement must be revised to include these elements.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding graduation requirements. This issue was addressed in Section VIII.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student record access and maintenance/destruction of records.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of location of other records and access sheets.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Location Of Other Records – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other records maintained by the district in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records is identified in the central file.**

Access Sheets - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that files for students eligible for speech/language services do not contain access sheets.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure access sheets are maintained in the files of students eligible for speech and language services.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Flemington Raritan Regional School District on March 14, 15, 2002. 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 review conducted during the self-assessment process, the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, approximately 35 parents attended. They expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Their concerns regarding professional development and teacher responsibility for implementation of the IEP had already been identified by the district during self-assessment.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Eligibility, Reevaluation, Discipline and Programs/Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policy/procedures, dissemination of public information, transfer procedures, appropriate certification of staff, provision of related services, length of school day/year, all areas of consent, surrogate parents, convening meetings, independent evaluations, 15-day/20-day timelines, referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting/timelines/participants, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings/participants, reevaluations completed by age five for pre-school students, IEP participants, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual reviews, 90-day timeline, individualized decision making/least restrictive environment statement, consideration/required statements, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, continuum of programs, student/agency invitation, agency linkages, pre-school transition conferences, early intervention programs to a pre-school disabilities program by age 3, student participation in statewide assessment, documentation of assessment in the IEP, accommodations/modifications for students taking the statewide assessment, student record access, maintenance/destruction of records and access sheets for students eligible for special educations and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, teacher access/responsibility for the IEP and student participation in the alternate assessment process.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, counseling goals/objectives, facilities, content/provision of district notices, native language, Child Find activities, functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services,

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acceptance/rejection of outside reports, written reports, notice of a reevaluation meeting, annual review process for students transitioning out of 8th grade, required components/considerations/statements, documentation of supplementary aids/services in the IEP, documentation of location of other records and access sheets for students eligible for speech/language services.

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.

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