

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

District: Florence Township School District **County:** Burlington

Monitoring Dates: May 6, 7, 8 and 9, 2002

Monitoring Team: Arlene Popovici, Julia B. Harmelin and Jane A. Marano

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Florence Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures programs, services and student outcomes. The self-assessment process provided the Florence 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 Florence 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, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As a first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting on April 30, 2002. Information from the 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Florence Township School District received an Inclusion Grant for \$200,000 for 2001 through 2002 (phase 1) and \$200,000 for 2002 through 2004 (phase 2). The money will be used for: [1] including classified students in general education programs, [2] an inclusion facilitator for the Roebing Elementary School and the Marcella L. Duffy Elementary School, [3] a consultant to do staff training, and, [4] additional staff, including

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

two special education teachers and an aide. In the second phase, building coordinators will be trained to carry on or transfer what the facilitators are doing in each elementary school, as well as to set up intensive trainings. In 2002 through 2003, they will develop these programs at the Florence Township Middle School and the Florence Township Memorial High School.

The Roebling Elementary School offers programs in stress management, anger control/management, divorce counseling, and self-esteem building for both the general education and special education students.

There is a district wide extended day program for all students.

The Florence Township School District sponsored two students and a special education teacher to attend a statewide Leadership Conference for students with disabilities.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of Dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding policies and procedures and professional and staff development. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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/year and transportation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding related services (specifically: occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and counseling), hearing aids, and transfer students. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses the area of hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address transfer students because it lacks a training component to ensure compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include that component. The district did not submit a plan to address related services. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures, in-service and administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, certification and facilities. The county office has been notified of the certification and facilities issues.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff and record review indicate that extended school year is not considered for all students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is considered for all students and that those considerations are documented in the IEP. The plan must 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 meetings, notice of meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, written notice, provision of due process rules, and native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Areas of Need:

Consent – During the on-site monitoring, a review of the records indicated that though consent is requested for initial evaluations and implementation, the form does not include a statement that parents have 15 days to consider the proposed action.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are informed they have 15 days to consider the proposed action.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses the areas of referral process, health summary, identification meeting timelines, and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the area of Child Find because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. Additionally, the district has participated in technical assistance sessions regarding the issue of an overrepresentation of minority

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

students in special education. Staff from the Office for Civil Rights and the Office of Special Education Programs will determine the appropriateness of that plan and advise the district of any additional requirements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting participants and summer referrals.

Areas of Need:

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that general education teachers are not consistently attending the preschool identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure general education teachers attend preschool identification meetings. The plan must include a mechanism to document attendance and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Summer Referrals – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that referrals are not being completed during the summer because child study teams are not available.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district has staff available to conduct mandated activities during the summer months. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of 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, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations and the acceptance and rejection of reports. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas

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

Area of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicated that evaluation reports include the date of the assessment, not the date the report was developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure evaluation reports identify the date the report is developed. The**

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

plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and turning age five.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at planning meetings.

Areas of Need:

Participants at Planning Meeting – During the on-site monitoring, a review of the student records indicated that general education teachers are not attending planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure general education teachers attend planning meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, participants, and criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria for eligible for speech and language services and copies of evaluations to parents. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-

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

day timelines, and teacher knowledge and access. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, *Oberti*, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, general education access, non-academic and extra curricular participation, and the continuum of options. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age-14 and age-16 transition service needs, courses of study, and preferences and interests. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses student/agency invitation and involvement and the documentation of preferences and interests. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the identification of programs, services and courses for student's successful transition at ages 14 and 16 because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conference.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of transition from early intervention programs to preschool development programs by the age of 3. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, suspension tracking, and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager and interim alternative education settings (IAES). The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses the area of providing documentation to case managers. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the area of interim alternative education settings because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, and alternate assessments. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses participation, IEP documentation and alternate assessments. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address approved modifications and accommodations because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP documented graduation requirements and diploma issuance. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area of Need:

Notice of Graduation – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents and adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of notice of graduation to parents and adult students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the 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 group sizes for speech and language therapy, class size, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of age range. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and adult student access to student records. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

Area of Need:

Location of Student Records – During the on-site monitoring, a review of central files indicated that the district does not document where other records are located.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files identify the location of other student records maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Florence Township School District on May 6, 7, 8, and 9, 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. The district is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify many areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their concerns with many of the district's programs and services. These concerns included funding issues and the negative impact those issues had on placement decisions, the lack of inclusion programs at the elementary level, delays in testing and obtaining the results, delays in receiving copies of IEPs, vacant speech therapist position, training needed for staff, and IEPs not being implemented. 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.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment process and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of day/year, transportation, meetings, independent evaluations, notice of meetings, parent/staff direct referrals, standardized assessments, functional behavioral assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, turning age five, eligibility meetings, participants, and criteria, documentation of eligibility, preschool planning transition conference, discipline procedures, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, group size for speech therapy, class-size, home instruction, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional and parent development, related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, written notice, native language, Child Find 3-21, referral process, health summary, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, Identification meetings, timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, eligibility criteria, evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, supplementary aides and services, general education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, continuum, EIP to PSD by age 3, student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age-14 and age-16 transition services, preferences, interests, courses, documentation to case manager, interim alternative education settings, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, IEP requirements, diploma, age-range waivers, and parent and adult-student access to records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, certification, facilities, consent, participants at preschool identification meeting, functional assessments, written reports, participants at reevaluation planning meetings, written notice of graduation, and documentation of locations of student records.

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

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Florence Township School 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.