

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

District: Fort Lee School District **County:** Bergen

Monitoring Dates: May 6 and 7, 2002

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright, Damen Cooper, Gladys Miller and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Fort Lee School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Fort Lee 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 Fort Lee 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, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing this 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 School #1, on May 1, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its participation in the New Jersey Child Assault Prevention Project that provides staff, parents and students with training through group discussion, narratives, role-playing and suggestions to help students protect themselves.

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In addition, the district is commended for their grant-funded programs such as the “Responsibility in Classroom Education” program that teaches elementary children to take pride in and be responsible for their work and the S.T.E.P. program that teaches parenting skills.

The district is also commended for its parent advisory councils that are reflective of the multi-ethnic diversity within the district.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of professional and parent development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district will revise its improvement plan to include this component.

No additional areas of need were 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 year/day, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services, transfer students and adaptive physical education services. The district’s improvement plan for adaptive physical education is sufficient to address this area of need. The district’s improvement plan for related services is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district’s improvement plan for transfer students is insufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and delivery of speech language services.

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that extended school year services are not consistently considered on an individual basis for in-district students.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year services are considered on an individual basis for all students. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Speech Language Services – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that although speech/language therapy schedules reflect what is required by IEPs, information obtained through the interview process indicated that schedules are not always adhered to. It was stated by district staff that therapy sessions are cancelled to conduct other mandated activities, such as initial evaluations and reevaluations. Cancelled sessions are not rescheduled because the number of existing staff and the fullness of existing schedules do not allow make-up sessions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure that speech and language services are consistently provided as required by IEPs. The plan must include a mechanism to determine whether the district has enough staff members to provide these mandated services. In the event the district determines it does not, the plan must further include a procedure to employ additional staff. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan for native language is sufficient to address this area of need. The district did not submit an improvement plan for consent and independent evaluations. In addition, the district's improvement plan for notices of meetings, written notice and meetings is insufficient to address these areas 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding surrogate parents.

Area of Need:

Surrogate Parent – During the on-site visit, interviews indicated that the district does not have a procedure to select and train surrogate parents in the event one is required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it develops procedures to select and train surrogate parents in the event one is needed.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the referral process, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Areas of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site visit, a review of Child Find materials indicated that these activities are limited to students ages three through five years.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities include all children between the ages three and twenty-one. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Summer Referrals – During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that all summer referrals, as well as referrals that are not completed during the school year, are addressed in September because the district does not employ child study team members and other staff members during the summer months.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district complies with evaluation timelines during the summer months. The plan must include a mechanism to determine how these timelines will be met, either through redeployment of existing staff or by other methods, to ensure that adequate staffing is available. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that general education teachers are not present at pre-school identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure general education teachers participate in pre-school identification meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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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, functional assessment, and acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding bilingual evaluation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of standardized assessment. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

Written reports was identified as an additional area of need during the on-site visit.

Area of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that written reports contain eligibility determination statements and are not consistently dated.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure eligibility determinations are made by an appropriately configured team and are not included in individual reports. The plan must also include a mechanism to ensure reports are dated when developed. This plan must include an administrative oversight component, ensuring consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines for re-evaluation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to 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 elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit concerning participants at reevaluation meetings for students turning age five.

Area of Need:

Participants at Reevaluation Meetings – During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that general education and special education teachers are not present at reevaluation planning meetings.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that special education and general education teachers are present at reevaluation planning meetings. The improvement plan must include 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 participants, documentation of eligibility and the provision of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding meetings and criteria for eligibility. The district's plan is insufficient to 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 revision to include these elements.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations/required statements, alignment of goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines and teacher access to and knowledge of the IEP. The district's plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district further identified a concern regarding participants at IEP meetings. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these elements.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring 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 and nonacademic/extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring

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about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these elements. The district further identified concerns in the areas of *Oberti* factors, considerations and documentation, use of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and the continuum. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address these areas of need. The plan needs to be revised to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition – Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests and age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern in the area of student/agency invitation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding age fourteen courses of study.

Areas of Need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that transition courses of study are not consistently aligned with projected post-secondary outcomes when the post-secondary outcome is other than college. Instead, all courses of study are geared toward college preparation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure courses of study are related to the desired post-secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and early intervention transition to preschool by age three years. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, manifestation determinations and interim alternative educational settings (I.A.E.S.).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with procedures, documentation to the case manager, behavioral intervention plans and functional behavior assessments. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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 areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations/modifications and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of alternate assessment and staff knowledge of content for statewide assessment. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight to bring about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these elements.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

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

Area of Need:

Written Notice – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that written notice of graduation was not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided to all graduates as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.12(b). The plan must**

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include an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 group sizes for speech and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of class-size waivers and age-range waivers. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The district will revise its improvement plan to include this component. The district also identified speech/language specialist staffing as an area of concern. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit concerning case management time.

Area of Need:

Case Management Time – During the on-site visit, a review of schedules and timeline data and interviews with staff and administrators indicated that current caseloads are preventing the district from completing mandated activities within required timelines.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it has sufficient staff to provide mandated services within required timelines.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/adult-student access to records, access sheet, maintenance and destruction of records.

Documentation of locations was identified as an area of need during the on-site visit.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Locations – During the on-site, a review of records indicated that the central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Fort Lee School District on May 6 and 7, 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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further 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, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents expressed the need for parent training on special education issues and programs. They also expressed a concern regarding the overall facility planning for special education students. Many of the other concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had been previously identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school year/day, facilities, certifications, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings, turning age five, eligibility participants, documentation of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, graduation IEP requirements, diploma, participation, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent/adult student access, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, related services, transfer students, obtaining consent, notices of meetings, written notice, holding of meetings, native language and independent evaluations, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals (parent/staff), timelines for identification meeting, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meetings, criteria, IEP components and timelines, least restricted environment considerations and programs, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, student agency invite, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, BIP/FBA, alternate assessment, staff knowledge of content of statewide assessment, class size waiver, age range waiver and staff knowledge of student record procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, provision of speech/language services, surrogate parents, Child Find, summer referrals, identification meeting participants, written reports, participants at reevaluation meetings for turning age five, courses of study, written notice of graduation, case management time and documentation of locations of records.

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Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Fort Lee 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 to the improvement plan.