

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

District: Fredon

County: Sussex

Monitoring Date: May 30, 2001

Monitoring Team: Stephanie DeBruyne, Janet C. Wright

Background Information

During the 2000 - 2001 school year, the Fredon Township School District conducted a self-assessment to determine whether the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to gather and review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

In 2000, the parents and staff were invited to attend a focus group public meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Information collected by the district was the basis for its self-assessment document that cites strengths and areas of need. The district has developed activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified as areas of need.

A second focus group public meeting was held in the district on April 18, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had some concerns.

District Strengths

The district has recently been notified that they have been awarded status by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School.

The district operates an enrichment program during the summer that consists of a variety of specialized classes which center on unique themes including designing murals, Dr. Suess, clay sculptures, craft making, tumbling, cooking, kitchen science, building mechanics, and introduction to Kindergarten.

The district operates a newscast program that is completely designed, written, and reported by students. This program is televised to each classroom every morning, and is presented in both English and Spanish.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards

General Provisions, Discipline and Graduation 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of speech therapy services and the provision of adapted physical education. The district's improvement plan for delivery of speech services is sufficient to address this need. However, the district did not submit an improvement plan to address the provision of adapted physical education.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding extended school year services and appropriate facilities for instruction.

Areas of Need:

Adapted Physical Education – During self-assessment the district identified an area of need related to the provision of adapted physical education. The district did not include improvement plan activities to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure adapted physical education is provided to students when determined appropriate by the IEP team.**

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, interviews with parents and staff identified different practices regarding the consideration of the need for extended school year programs. Some parents indicated that extended school year services are not routinely discussed at IEP meetings. Others indicated that it is considered, but not documented in the IEP. Interviews with child study team members indicated that extended school year services are provided to students in out-of-district programs, only.

Some staff members reported they consider the summer program offered by a neighboring district as an option to provide extended school year services. The district provides transportation to this summer program by sending a letter to all

families asking if they want to take advantage of this 2.5 hour a day program. Attendance at this program is up to the discretion of the parent.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that extended school year services are considered for all students. The plan must ensure these considerations and the provision of services are based on the individual needs of the students as determined through the application of a regression/recoupment formula, among other factors. The plan must further ensure these considerations are documented in IEPs.**

Appropriate Facilities for instruction – During the parent focus group as well as during the interview process with staff, it was reported that the resource room instructional space was too small and not conducive to learning. Two special education teachers and a teacher associate with only a small freestanding bulletin board to separate the groups that are being instructed simultaneously, utilize the resource room. Class visits to the resource room confirmed this statement. The superintendent acknowledged concerns about this instructional space and has been meeting with staff to come up with a better plan for the upcoming school year.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that only appropriate space is used to provide resource center instruction. It is recommended the district consult with the county office to assist with these required activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding timelines for evaluations and reevaluations, and surrogate parents. Improvement plan activities will sufficiently address these areas of need.

The district also identified an area of need regarding documentation of attempts to secure parent participation in meetings. The improvement plan will not sufficiently address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at meetings, components of written notices, and the provision of notice for students eligible for speech language services.

Areas of Need:

Documenting attempts to secure parent participation – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that there was a need to document attempts to secure parent participation in meetings. The improvement plan indicates that the director will monitor parent participation at meetings. This will not sufficiently address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that attempts to obtain parent participation at meetings are documented. The plan should include a tracking mechanism to log these attempts.**

Participants at meetings – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records indicated that the required participants do not consistently attend meetings. Specifically, it was noted that speech-language specialists have not been in attendance at identification meetings for preschool aged students, regular education teachers have not attended eligibility and reevaluation meetings for preschool students, and special education teachers are not attending reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure required participants attend meetings.**

Components of Notices/Written Notices – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined the district has individual notice forms for each type of meeting with corresponding individual written notice formats. These written notice forms were last revised in November 1998. Based on a review of these forms, it was determined that the notices of meetings and written notices do not contain all of the required components.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that notices of meetings and written notices contain the required components required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14. It is recommended that the district utilize the state model notice forms.**

Provision of notices for meetings and written notices regarding students eligible for speech language services - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records indicated that though parents attend meetings, the district does not maintain documentation of the provision of notice.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that copies of notices are maintained in student records.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need. However, areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find activities, notice of identification meetings (addressed in Section III) and consent for students being referred for speech language services.

Areas of Need:

Child Find Activities – During the on-site monitoring visit, the district’s Child Find activities were reviewed. The procedures addressed activities to locate and identify students to age five, only.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that Child Find activities include all children between the ages three and twenty-one.**

Identification Meeting and Consent for students referred for speech language services only – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records indicated that because the district does not maintain document of the provision of notice, it could not be determined whether identification meetings were held within 20-days of receipt of the referral. Additionally, the record review indicated the district does not maintain documentation of parental consent to an evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that maintains documentation of notices and consent forms in the student file.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district determined that they were not individualizing the choice of evaluators, assessment instruments, and procedures when they were evaluating students. The district also determined that they were not appropriately accepting or rejecting outside reports. The improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary assessments for preschool students and for students being evaluated for speech language services, and components of written reports.

Areas of Need:

Multi-disciplinary Assessment for Preschool Students – Interviews with staff and a review of records of incoming preschool students indicated the speech assessment is counted as one of the two required assessments by the CST.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that evaluations for preschool students include assessments by two team members and that the speech/language assessment is counted as a third assessment and not one of the two required assessments.**

Multi-Disciplinary Speech-Language Evaluation - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review that the district did not consistently include a statement regarding the educational impact of the speech problem.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that speech-language evaluations include a written statement from the student's teacher of the educational impact of the speech problem.**

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records determined that written reports developed by individual team members and speech-language specialists were not dated. Additionally, analysis of instructional implications, relevant behaviors and their relationship to the student's academic functioning, and a history of interventions were not consistently included in the reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written reports include all required components according to N.J.A.C. 6A:14.**

Section VI: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district self-assessment did not identify any areas of need related to eligibility. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the documentation of determination of eligibility.

Area(s) of Need:

Determination of Eligibility – A review of written reports indicated evaluators are including eligibility statements in their individual reports instead of developing a statement in a collaborative manner with the other members of the IEP team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the IEP team**

makes eligibility determinations, and that these determinations are not documented in individual assessment reports.

Section VII: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need regarding Reevaluation. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation activities for students eligible for speech language services.

Area of Need:

Reevaluation Activities for students eligible for speech language services – Interviews with the superintendent indicated that the lack of speech services has impacted on the district's ability to conduct a number of mandated activities. During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records indicated students eligible for speech-language services were not being reevaluated within the three-year timeframe. Additionally, because of a lack of documentation it could not be verified that reevaluation planning meetings were being conducted or that consent for new assessments was being obtained from parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that reevaluation activities for students eligible for speech language services are implemented in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14. It is recommended that the district's activities be linked to those in Section II: FAPE.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need related to IEPs. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding components and considerations and required statements in IEPs for students eligible for special education and related services and for students eligible for speech language services.

Areas of Need:

Components, Considerations and Required Statements – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of the IEPs generated before and after October 2000 found that some components, considerations and required statements were not included on a consistent basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that all IEPs contain required components, considerations and statements.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need related to least restrictive environment. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of individual decision-making for removal from regular education.

Areas of Need:

Documentation of Individual Decision-Making — During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of IEPs was conducted. Although students are afforded placements along the continuum, this review indicated that documentation in the IEP does not consistently demonstrate an individualized decision-making process when students are removed from general education. While the district has begun to utilize the recently modified state IEP model, it is apparent that some child study team members are unsure regarding the documentation of this process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs document an individualized decision-making process for removal from regular education. The plan must include an in-service component. It is recommended that the district attend technical assistance sessions provided by the Office of Special Education Programs/Learning Resource Center that focus on the decision-making process.**

Section X: Transition

A. Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding participation in the transition planning conference for children involved in early intervention programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

B. Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need related to Transition from School to Post-School. No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need related to the use of alternate assessment for those students exempt from participating in statewide assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need related to the oversight of home instruction. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need. However, during the on-site an area of need was identified regarding access sheets in files for students eligible for speech and language services.

Areas of Need:

Access Sheets – A review of ESL student files indicated the district does not include access sheets in the file.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure each ESL student file has an access sheet.**

Summary

The on-site monitoring visit was conducted in Fredon on May 30, 2001 after a public focus group meeting. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings and improvement plan resulting from self-assessment. The district is commended for the 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 and for self-identifying a number of areas of need and developing an improvement plan that with some revision should bring about the needed changes. The district is further commended for its placement practices that have resulted in the inclusion of the majority of its disabled students in general education settings with their nondisabled peers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of speech language services; oversight of speech IEP implementation; provision of adapted physical education; meeting timelines; surrogate parents; documentation of attempts to have parents at meetings; standardized assessments; acceptance/rejections of reports; attendance at transition planning conference for preschool students; use of alternate assessments; and oversight of home instruction.

The on-site team identified additional areas of need within the various standards, including facilities; components of notice; provision of notice; participants at meetings; child find procedures; identification meetings for students eligible for speech/language services; multidisciplinary evaluation; components of written reports; reevaluation; documentation of eligibility; components/considerations and required statements of IEPs; documentation of the individual decision-making process; and access sheets.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of this monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit its improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.