

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

District: Freehold Borough School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: February 9 & 14, 2005

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten & Kim Murray

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Freehold Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Freehold Borough School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Freehold Borough 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.

A focus group meeting for parents and community members was held at the Freehold Borough Park Avenue Complex. Information obtained from that meeting and through phone interviews with parents was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information. A sample of special education and speech records was also reviewed.. Interviews were conducted with the district's director of special education, child study team members, general education teachers, special education teachers and related services providers.

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Data Summary:

A review of the district data for the past two years indicated the Freehold Borough School District has been able to decrease the percentage of students receiving special education from 18.9% during the 2003-2004 school year, to 16% in the 2004-2005 school year.

Additionally, during the 2004-2005 school year, more than 73% of the district's special needs students were educated in a general education setting for at least 80% of the school day compared to the state average of 41.6%.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their relationship with the Freehold Borough Educational Foundation. This association provides an opportunity for the students of the district to access scholarship monies, community service opportunities and after school activities that utilize innovative teachings to enhance student development.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records 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 (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, goals and objectives and frequency, duration and location of related services, length of day/year, facilities and certifications.

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

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, provision of notice of a meeting, written notices, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, content of meeting notices and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and the documentation of the nature and scope of evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of outside evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services. 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 VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of three year timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of the nature and scope of the reevaluation plan. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Area of Need:

Meeting participants at reevaluation planning meetings: During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review and staff interviews that general education staff does not consistently attend reevaluation planning meetings.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified compliance in the statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of general education staff meeting participants, signatures of agreement/disagreement, copy of the evaluation reports 10 days prior to a meeting and criteria for specific learning disabled students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, present levels of educational performance statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copies of IEPs to parents. **Although the district identified this as an area of need, no improvement plan was submitted to address this area. The district will develop activities to ensure that parents receive a copy of an IEP prior to its implementation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

Area of Need:

Meeting participants: During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review and staff interviews that general education staff does not consistently attend IEP meetings.

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

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of general education access in district, decision making process and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities to out-of-district students. 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.

Area of Need:

Decision Making Regarding Least Restrictive Environment: During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review and staff interviews that the district does not consistently address and document all required components of the when considering the least restrictive environment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the IEP specifies: the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications; the explanation why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate; and, the documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the area of preferences and interests assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services and student and agency invite. **Although the district identified these areas as areas of need, no improvement plan was submitted to address them. The district will develop activities to ensure the development of district-wide procedures to address age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services and student and agency invitations to transition meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the Freehold Borough School District on February 9 & 14, 2005. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 its comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify several areas of need and develop improvement plans that will bring about systemic change in those identified areas of need. The district is further commended for the areas identified as compliant during the self-assessment and verified as such by the Office of Special Education Programs.

General Provisions, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held, several parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents reported that the classroom environments are "comforting and teachers are open to communication", successful adjustments occur for preschoolers, students participate to the extent possible in the least restrictive environment, decision-making is individualized and that parents are fully involved in the education of their children. A parental concern was raised regarding the general education staff attitudes towards inclusion.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, provision of programs, goals and objectives and frequency, duration and location of related services, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, provision of notice of a meeting, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meetings timelines/participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations, three year reevaluation timelines, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled students, present levels of education performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, regular education access in the district, continuum of placement options and preferences and interests assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer students, surrogate parents, content of meeting notices, independent evaluations, Child Find, vision and hearing screenings, health summaries, documentation of the nature and scope of initial evaluations and reevaluations, functional assessments for speech only students, general education staff meeting participants for eligibility meetings, signatures of agreement/disagreement, copies of evaluations reports 10 days prior to a meeting, criteria for specific learning disabled students and notification of extracurricular/nonacademic activities to out-of-district

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students. Additional areas of need identified by the district as noncompliant, and confirmed as such through staff interviews and document review, but without improvement plans include copies of IEPs to parents, age 14- transition service needs, age 16- needed transition services and student/agency invite to transition meetings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding general education meeting participants at reevaluation planning meetings and IEP meetings and least restrictive environment documentation.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Freehold Borough School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.