

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

District: Frenchtown School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: November 13, 2003

Monitoring Team: Barbara J. Tucker, Michelle E. Davis

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Frenchtown 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 Frenchtown 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 Frenchtown 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.

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 the Frenchtown Elementary School on November 3, 2003. Information obtained from that 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 district is commended for its **Cooking for Life Project** which is funded by a grant from the Hunterdon County Educational Foundation. The project has enhanced the special education program at the school and has been of value to the general population as well. The program involves many activities that have increased the self-esteem of the students and has improved

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their social skills by giving the student life skills and career education. As a result of this project, students have gained confidence in their abilities to produce culinary delights. Students also have improved their ability to read, follow directions and make mathematical calculations.

The district also provides weekly sign language instruction for students in the sixth grade. In the beginning, the instruction was viewed as an effort to provide a broader communication base for a hearing impaired student. The instruction has since spread to the student's peers, teachers and parents. The positive results of the instruction were witnessed last year, when during the school's Shakespearian production the student both spoke and signed his part. The parents of this student have passed on the training to other relatives, thus widening the circle of communication.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Statewide Assessment 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.

Data Summary:

The Frenchtown Borough School District data indicated a classification rate at 14.3% during the 2002-2003 school year, which is slightly above the state average of 13.4%. In response to these data, the district identified the referral and pre-referral processes in the self-assessment as areas of concern and has successfully addressed these concerns through their improvement plan. The district is commended for taking immediate action to reduce the classification rate through the self-assessment process.

The district is further commended for the number of students placed in general education classes over the last three years. Review of data indicates that during the 1999-2000 school year over 95% of the district's classified school-aged students were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. This percentage dropped to 72.7% and 71.4% respectively during the next two years when the district attracted parents and students to the newly developed in-district preschool disabilities program. However, the district is still above the 41.6% New Jersey State average. Even though the district is above the state average in this area, in the self-assessment, the district identified a need to provide additional in-class support programs or resource pull-out programs in the general education setting. The district further addressed this area in the self-assessment when it opted to provide additional training to teachers in the area of instructional strategies and accommodations/modifications in the general education setting. As a result of these actions, it is anticipated that a larger percentage of classified students will be educated with their non-disabled peers.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs/related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities and certification.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of goals and objectives for related services and changes being made to students' IEPs prior to meetings. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in 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 themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, provision of notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and provision of procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written notice and 20-day timelines for parental requests. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and identification meetings/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, 20-day timeline, documentation of referral date, health summaries and vision /hearing screenings. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, signed/dated reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent for speech/language evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, nature and scope for students eligible for speech/language services and written reports for students eligible for speech/language services. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants for students eligible for special education and related services, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled (SLD), copy of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for special education and related services, and documentation of agreement/disagreement in files of students eligible for special education and related services

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants at meetings for students eligible for speech/language services, eligibility meetings for students eligible for speech/language services, criteria for determining students eligible for speech/language services, statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech/language services, copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of agreement/disagreement and use of appropriate speech/language evaluation tools. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, age of majority, annual review timelines, implementation dates and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations/required statements, goals and objectives , teacher access/knowledge, copy of IEP to parents, changes to IEPs prior to meetings and documentation of student outcomes. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were 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, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination meetings and provision of procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding written notice to the case manager. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class sizes, group sizes for speech/language services, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of resource programs. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were 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 parental access, access sheets, maintenance/destruction and documentation of other file locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of information to parents and lack of staff knowledge regarding student record policies and procedures. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Frenchtown Borough School District on November 13, 2003. 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 Frenchtown Borough School District is to be commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic change in most areas. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of data indicated that, in response to the district classification rate being slightly above the state average, the district identified the referral and pre-referral processes in the self-assessment as areas of concern and has successfully addressed these concerns through their improvement plan. Furthermore, the district has maintained a placement rate for classified students in the general education setting that has been consistently above the New Jersey State average by several percentage points. The district continued this positive trend by providing additional training to teachers in the area of instructional strategies and accommodations/modifications in the general education setting. As a result of these actions, it is anticipated that a larger percentage of classified students will be educated with their non-disabled peers.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit and attended by three parents of special education students, two parents who were board members and four staff members, parents stated that they are very happy with the high quality of special education services their children are receiving. According to parents, the programs not only challenge the students, but also provide the help, tools and instruction students need to stay focused. Parents also stated that the child study team (CST) members provide a thorough evaluation of the students' needs and develop programs to meet their needs within the regular class setting as much as possible. According to one parent, the children "love" school and are welcomed into all activities, because the district seems to promote a "loving attitude" which permeates throughout the entire school population. Parents stated that they are invited to meetings and are typically provided with a copy of the IEP at the meeting or very shortly thereafter. The district welcomes parental input and parents feel that there is a "team approach" in the development of the IEP program. Parents applauded the staff's professionalism and the "open-door" communication policy they have with the CST and staff. The district's school board president stated that the district has restructured its programs and set goals for its special education program. Additionally, the district is "creative with its resources" resulting in special education students being integrated into the general education setting. Additionally, parents are pleased with the district's preschool disabilities program. Children receive services by their 3rd birthday and staff members attend the Early Intervention Program meetings. The district recently developed an in-district Pre-school Disabilities program to meet that population's needs in the least restrictive environment.

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Statewide Assessment and Graduation, were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

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/related services, length of day/year, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parents,

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consent, provision of notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, provision of procedural safeguards, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meetings/participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, signed/dated reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, meeting participants for students eligible for special education and related services, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability (SLD), copy of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for special education and related services, documentation of agreement/disagreement in files of for students eligible for special education and related services, meeting participants, age of majority, annual review timelines, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination meetings, provision of procedural safeguards, class sizes, group sizes for speech/language services, home instruction, consultation time, parental access, access sheets, maintenance/destruction and documentation of other file locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding goals and objectives for related services, changes being made to students' IEPs prior to meetings, written notice, 20-day timelines for parental requests, child find, documentation of referral date, health summaries/vision/hearing screenings, consent for speech/language services, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, nature and scope for students eligible for speech/language services, written reports for students eligible for speech/language services, participants at meetings for students eligible for speech/language services, eligibility meetings for students eligible for speech/language services, criteria for determining students eligible for speech/language services, statement of eligibility for determining students eligible for speech/language services, copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of agreement/disagreement, use of appropriate speech/language evaluation tools, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives, teacher access/knowledge, copy of IEP to parents, changes to IEP prior to meetings, documentation of student outcomes, written notice to case manager, resource programs, information to parents regarding student records and lack of staff knowledge regarding student record policies and procedures.

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