

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

District: Garwood School District

County: Union

Monitoring Dates: December 3, 2003

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Vanessa Leonard

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Garwood School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Garwood 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 Garwood 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 Lincoln/Franklin School on November 10, 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 recognizing the social and emotional needs of their students with disabilities and developing several programs to address those needs. The district has an active peer mediation program as a means of facilitating tolerance and understanding between students. In addition, the district provides peer support groups during lunch time. The Lunch Club, facilitated by the school counselor, provides a forum for students with similar needs for group sharing and problem solving.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, FAPE, Evaluation, Reevaluation, IEP, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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 Garwood School District currently has a classification rate of 14.3%, which is below the state average. 45% of students are placed in general education for more than 80% of the day, which is consistent with the state average. During the 2002-2003 school year, 60% of preschool aged students were placed in general education settings, significantly exceeding the state average of 23.2%.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, notices, notices in native language and surrogate parents.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding independent evaluations.

Area(s) of Need:

Independent Evaluations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that when granting a request for an independent evaluation, district personnel limit the dollar amount for the evaluation. Though the district may set a reasonable limit on the cost of an independent evaluation, it must have a procedure in place that will allow the district to consider a parental request for an evaluation that is outside the limit established by the district. Should the district consider the request and deny it, the district must request a due process hearing to resolve the dispute.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district considers parental requests for independent evaluations that exceed the cost limitations established by the district. Implementation of these procedures will ensure disputes are resolved through due process and that independent evaluations are conducted in a timely manner.**

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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 referral process, direct referrals, timelines, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find. 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 VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, notices, participants, criteria for specific learning disability and documentation of eligibility.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Evaluation Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that while parents are provided with copies of evaluation reports prior to the eligibility meeting, it is not at least 10 days prior to the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure parents receive copies of evaluation reports at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meetings. This will allow parents the opportunity to gather information necessary to meaningfully participate as a member of the IEP team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 14 statement of transition service needs.

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

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of early intervention to preschool disabled program by age three and preschool transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan regarding early intervention program to a preschool disabled program is sufficient to address this area of need. The district did not include an improvement plan to address the area of concern regarding the preschool transition planning conference. **The district will revise its improvement plan to address this area of need. This will ensure that district personnel attend preschool transition planning meetings to more effectively obtain information regarding the strengths and needs of students in EIP settings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

Section XIII: Graduation

As Garwood is a k-8 district, there are no findings in this area.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access to student records, access sheets, destruction of student records and documentation of other locations of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding maintenance of student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Maintenance of Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that when a student is transitioning from the Garwood School District to the receiving high school district that the entire student record is transferred. The Garwood School District does not maintain copies of any portion of the student record. N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d) requires districts to maintain "mandated or permitted records required as part of programs established through state administered entitlement or discretionary funds from the U.S Department of Education must be maintained for a period of five years after completion of the program activities." The district must retain copies of the most current student IEPs and evaluations for a period of five years in order to demonstrate the provision of special education and related services

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures for the maintenance of student records. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Garwood School District on **December 3, 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 Garwood School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision is sufficient to bring about systemic change. Additionally, the district is 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.

General Provisions, FAPE, Evaluation, Reevaluation, IEP, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The meeting, held on November 10, 2003, was attended by five parents. All of the parents reported satisfaction with their children's educational program. In addition, the parents stated that they were satisfied with the level of communication with district personnel. Parents reported that they attended IEP meetings and felt they were considered valuable members of the IEP team.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included timelines, notices, notices in native language, surrogate parents, referral process, direct referrals, timelines, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria for specific learning disability, documentation of eligibility, age 14 statement of transition service needs, access to student records, access sheets, destruction of students records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding child find, early intervention to preschool disabled program by age three and preschool transition planning conferences.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding independent evaluations, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting and maintenance of student records.

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