

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

District: Gibbsboro School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Date: February 9, 2004

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin, Trish Fair

Background Information:

During the 2002-2003 school year, the Gibbsboro School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Gibbsboro 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 Gibbsboro 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 Gibbsboro School on February 9, 2004. 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 child study team members and director of special services.

District Strengths:

The district has implemented Project Read in all kindergarten classes and is using it with identified "at risk" children through third grade. The district also paid to have two teachers fully trained in the Phonemic Awareness Strand and then turn-keyed the information to eight other teachers and staff.

A building program was passed by the township and construction has begun on the expansion of the school. This will allow the district to provide more programmatic options for disabled and nondisabled preschoolers.

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Part One Data Summary:

The Gibbsboro School District reported an area of need with its classification rate of 18% for the 2001-2002 school year, which is above the state average of 13.4%. This area is being addressed through the district's improvement plan. The data submitted by the district indicated that the placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average, but this has also been addressed through the district's improvement plan. For students ages 6-21, 51.7% of the students eligible for special education and related services were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day during the 2002-2003 school year; this falls above the state average of 41.6%. In addition, Gibbsboro School District has no staff on emergency certificates, nor have any general education or special education students been suspended.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEP, Transition to Post-School, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, 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.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

Area of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although extended school year is provided for students with disabilities, the program is not described in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the extended school year program is described in the student's IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff are fully aware of the identified needs of the student and that the agreed upon program is provided to adequately address those needs.**

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. This area of need was corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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 child find ages 3-21, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the referral process. This area of need was corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti, considerations and documentation, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, and continuum. The district identified their barriers as having no formal process to inform out-of-district students of extracurricular activities and that although preschool disabled students are given a continuum of options, there is no inclusive placement within the district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district has implemented a procedure to include out-of-district students in district mailings and has implemented an inclusive half-day preschool program in the district.

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

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Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of location of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. This area of need was corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Gibbsboro School District on February 9, 2004. 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all but one area 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 prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. 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.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the percentage of preschool students who are in general education settings by implementing an inclusive half-day preschool program. The district has increased the percentage of school aged students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day, and plans to increase this percentage through the school building project. Staff training and communication between staff and administrators have contributed to maintaining students in school without the need for suspensions.

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 commended the district on the accessibility and cooperation of the child study team, the appropriate placements and programs for students, and the happiness of the students in the district. Many parents made a point of stating that they moved to this community because of the excellent standards of the school district and do not plan on moving from this community until their children have completed their education in this district.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEP, Transition to Preschool, Transition to Post-School, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, child find ages 3-21, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, visions and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants and timelines, individualized decision-making, Oberti, considerations and documentation, regular education access, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents, referral process, supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum of programs, and documentation of locations of other records. Many of these areas were corrected by the district prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding extended school year.

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