

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

District: Gloucester City School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: October 1, 2, 3, 4, 2001

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano, Arlene Popovici, Cathy Thomas

Background Information

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Gloucester City School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Gloucester City 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 Gloucester City School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As a first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for the parents and community members at the Gloucester Junior/ Senior High School on September 27, 2001. Information obtained from the meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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.

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

District Strengths:

The district has developed an alternative high school program called Highland Park Program for Success. The primary goal is to provide an educational program to those classified and nonclassified students who desire to complete high school and are not succeeding in the traditional school setting provided by the Gloucester City Public Schools. This program consists of three interrelated components. The first component addresses the academic needs of these students by providing individualized instruction in core academic subjects within small class settings. The second component addresses the emotional issues of these students by offering individual, group, family, and career/ life skills counseling. A certified counselor is present throughout their school day. The third component addresses their vocational needs by affording students the opportunity to participate in activities that will take place both in the classroom and out in the community. Students who are gainfully employed have the opportunity to earn credits towards graduation. Community service is viewed as a valued component of this program and allows students to earn credit towards graduation by performing volunteer work in the community.

The district has made a commitment to maintain students with significant behavioral issues within the district by developing in-school support programs for students who might otherwise be suspended.

District staff have consistently commented that if a student needs a specific program, service or piece of equipment, the district will do whatever it takes to make them available.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

F.A.P.E., Evaluation, and Statewide Assessments 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.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parental and professional staff development. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The plan needs to be revised to include this mechanism.

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

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

III. Procedural Safeguards:

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings and written notice. 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.

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with parent and staff direct referrals, summer referrals, participants at identification meetings, and health summaries.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, the referral process, vision and hearing screenings, and timelines for identification meetings. 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.

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at the planning meeting and conducting reevaluations for students with disabilities turning age five

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and planning meetings. 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.

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

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, participants at eligibility meetings, establishing eligibility based on required criteria and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with IEP participants, considerations and required statements, age of majority, and teacher's knowledge and access to student IEPs. 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.

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with individualized decision-making, Oberti, supplemental aids and services and regular education accessibility.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with considerations and documentation, non-academic/ extra curricular participation, and the full continuum. 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.

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

X. Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding preschool transition planning conferences, evaluations and placements in programs by the third birthday, age 14 and 16 transition services, agency invitations, and preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of agency involvement. 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.

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding procedures, suspension tracking, BIP/FBA, manifestation determinations, and IAES.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of written notification to the case manager. 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.

XIII. Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding IEP requirements, diplomas, and participation.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with providing written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction.

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of group size for replacement resource 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.

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parental/adult student access to records, documenting access to student records, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of student records.

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

Area of Need:

Documentation of Location of Student Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that central files do not indicate the location of other student records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files identify the location of other student records maintained by the district.**

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

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Gloucester City School District on October 1, 2, and 3, 2001. 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 thorough and 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 also 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA, FAPE, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, direct and summer referrals, provision of health summaries, participants at identification meetings and eligibility meetings, evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, documentation and criteria for eligibility, implementation and annual review of IEPs, individualized decision-making, access to regular education programs, supplementary aides and services, transition to preschool, high school and work, vocational and career exploration opportunities, discipline standards, statewide assessments, graduation requirements, participation, and documentation, home instruction, group sizes for speech therapy, age ranges, and student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional and staff development, surrogate parents, consent, written notice and notice of meetings, Child Find, referral process, vision and hearing screenings, planning meeting, identification and reevaluation meeting timelines, copy of evaluations to parents, IEP participants, considerations and required statements, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access, considerations and documentation, the full continuum, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, agency involvement with transition, notification to the case manager, written notice of graduation requirements, and waivers for class size.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding the location of other student records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address

the area of need identified during the on-site visit and the area that requires a revision to the improvement plan.

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

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

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