

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Great Meadows Regional

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: September 19 and 20, 2005

Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Great Meadows Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Great Meadows Regional 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 Great Meadows Regional 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, general education and special education teachers, speech – language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 68.7% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is significantly higher than the state rate of 39.2% for that year. A review of data in this category for the two previous school years demonstrates a consistent trend of educating the vast majority of students with disabilities in general education for the major portion of their day (74.1% in 2003-2004 and 78% in 2002-2003). Additionally, only 5% of students with disabilities attended school in private or public schools outside of the district compared to the state rate of 6%. However, the district has placed all 4-year-old preschool students with

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disabilities in the district’s self-contained special education program for preschoolers. Since parents indicated that general education preschool placement was not an option for placement, the district has been identified as noncompliant in the area of continuum of placements for preschoolers.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) Evaluation | Transition to Preschool Discipline |
| Reevaluation | Statewide Assessments |
| Individualized Education Program (IEP) | Graduation |

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the Department of Education as compliant.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Procedural Safeguards– For students who may be eligible for speech and language services (ESLS) or eligible for special education and related services (ESERS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Provision of notice of a meeting ▪ Conducting meetings ▪ Provision of written notice ▪ Content of written notice ▪ Notices in native language ▪ Interpreters at meeting ▪ Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI) - For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find Ages 3-21 ▪ Referral process ▪ Pre-referral interventions ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Identification meeting timelines ▪ Identification meeting participants
Eligibility- For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability) ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of LRE decisions (ages 6 to 21) ▪ Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs (ages 6 to 21) ▪ Placement decisions based on students' individual needs (ages 6 to 21)
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of "transition service needs"
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class size ▪ Age range ▪ Common planning time

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Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an ‘X’ in the ‘Needs Revision’ column.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
General Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent Training 	X		X
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notice of meeting - content – Notice of meetings does not include a statement that the parent may invite others with expertise 	X		X
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surrogate Parents – There is no procedure in place to train surrogate parents since the district was unfamiliar with the regulatory requirement. 	X		X
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health Summary – not provided prior to identification meetings - The improvement plan must be revised to include the provision of a health summary to the CST for all students referred to the CST. 		X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vision and Hearing Screenings – When there is a direct referral from the CST or parent, there is no procedure in place to notify the nurse that results of vision and hearing screenings will be needed for the identification meeting. 	X		X
LRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities of students educated outside the district – Students placed in out-of-district programs were not included in the mailing list for activities. 	X		X
Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speech group sizes – The IEP did not specify whether speech- language services were to be administered in a group or individually since the speech-language specialist was unfamiliar with the code requirement. 	X		X

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Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
Eligibility	Copy of evaluation reports to parents – The district did not provide copies of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to eligibility meetings.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that copies of evaluation reports are provided to parents ten days prior to eligibility meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are informed of the results of their child's evaluation and, if necessary, can seek additional information prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.
LRE	Continuum, individual decision making and opportunity to access general education programs for preschoolers - Preschool placement data and parent interviews with monitors and the county office of education indicate that general education placement is not an option for preschoolers with disabilities.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a full continuum of program options is available for preschoolers with disabilities and that general education placement with supplementary aids and services is the first consideration. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Great Meadows Regional School District on September 19 and 20, 2005. 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further acknowledged for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the OSEP as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 68.7% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is significantly higher than the state rate of 39.2% for that year. A review of data in this category for the two previous school years demonstrates a consistent trend of educating the vast majority of students with disabilities in general education for the major portion of their day (74.1% in 2003-2004 and 78% in 2002-2003). Additionally, only 5% of students with disabilities attended school in private or public schools outside of the district compared to the state rate of 6%. However, the district has placed all 4-year-old preschool students with disabilities in the district's self-contained special education program for preschoolers. Since parents indicated that general education preschool placement was not an option for placement discussed at IEP meetings, the district has been identified as noncompliant in the area of continuum of placements for preschoolers.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, with the exception of the preschool placement issue, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: **Free, Appropriate Public Education, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Individualized Education Programs, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessments and Graduation.**

Areas within the standards identified as compliant by the district and verified by the monitoring team include: consent, implementation without undue delay, provision and content of notice of meeting, meetings, written notice, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, signature of disagreement or agreement, statement of eligibility, documentation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) decisions (ages 6-21), opportunities to access general education, decision based on individual needs, age fourteen statement, class size for self-contained, in-class support and resource center, age range and common planning time.

Areas of need originally identified noncompliant by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are parent training, content of notice of a meeting, surrogate parents, vision and hearing screenings, notification of and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside the district and speech group size. The area of health summary was also identified during self-assessment but the improvement plan requires revision.

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The on-site visit identified additional area of need within the various standards, regarding copies of evaluation reports to parents, continuum of placements, individual decision making and opportunities to access general education programs for preschoolers with disabilities.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Great Meadows School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the OSEP to address the areas that require revisions.