

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Hackensack Public Schools

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: June 10 and 11, 2002

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Hackensack Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hackensack Public 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 Hackensack Public 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 the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Middle School on June 10, 2002. Information obtained from that 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.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for taking the initiative to include special education students in all areas of academic and non-academic activities. As part of the Local Capacity Building and Improvement Project for Special Education- Least Restrictive Environment grant, the district has initiated inclusion programs at the Hiller elementary school. This initiative also includes a cooperative program with Bergen County Special Services

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hearing impaired program that allows hearing impaired students to participate in mainstream general education programs by utilizing a sign language interpreter. This integration of students has also fostered the creation of a sign language club at the elementary level.

The district provides a Drop In Center for students and their families in collaboration with Hackensack Medical Center. The center provides career exploration and job placement, supportive and family counseling, health promotion programs, referral to health and social services, drop-out prevention, recreation and life exploration activities, tutoring services, violence prevention and conflict management programs, and substance abuse counseling and referral.

The district also provides a C.A.R.E.S. program that supports parents with adult literacy education including computer instruction, English as a Second Language, adult basic education and general educational development test instruction, parenting education, and home visits. Children are also provided with parent/child programs and homework tutoring.

The Lens Crafter Foundation has provided free eye examinations and glasses for district students who do not have medical insurance.

The sixth grade students participate in a one week summer outdoor education program consisting of orienteering, water ecology and team building.

Senior citizens volunteer in all schools through the Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Bergen County (RSVP) programs. Seniors volunteer in classrooms through America Reads by working with individuals or small groups of students. In addition, volunteers participate in the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) literacy project to help children improve reading skills.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional/parent development and dissemination of IDEA information. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, parent and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, related services (speech/language) and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notice and holding of meetings for ESERS. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice and holding of meetings for students eligible for speech/language services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address concerns in these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 in the areas of Child Find and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of referral process, direct referrals, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings and identification meeting participants and timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessment, written reports, and acceptance or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluation completed by June 30th of student's last year in pre-school.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and participants at reevaluation planning meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility and the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas for students eligible for special education and related services. During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that the district has are appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns with meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility and the provision of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for speech/language services. The district's plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations/required statements, alignment of goals and objectives with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines/ninety-day timelines and teacher access to and knowledge of the IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

IX. LRE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations/documentation, use of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

X. Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

During the self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age fourteen transition services, courses of study, preferences/interest and needed transition services at age sixteen. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations and interim alternative educational setting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to

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address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of findings:

During the self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of participation, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, and alternate assessment. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma, participation and written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range waivers, class size waivers and group sizes for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of home instruction approvals, collaborative time, description of programs and employment of sufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, access sheet, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of locations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of parent/adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records. During the on-site visit, interviews and record

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review indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district's plan is insufficient to address the area of documentation of locations because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 Hackensack Public School District on June 10 and 11, 2002. 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 areas 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.

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 also expressed pride in their establishment and participation in a parent/advocacy support services group. 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 self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, provision of related services, length of school year/day, facilities, certifications, obtaining consent (ESERS), native language and independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, summer referrals, bilingual evaluations, turning age five, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, age range waivers, class size waivers, and group sizes for speech language therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of related services (speech), transfer students, surrogate parents, obtaining consent (ESLS), notices of meetings, written notice, holding of meetings, referral processes, direct referrals (parent/staff), health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, participants and timelines for identification meeting, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants at planning meeting, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, goals and objective aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, student agency invite, agency involvement in transition, age fourteen and sixteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, BIP/FBA, manifestation determination, IAES, participation in statewide assessment, accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation IEP requirements, diploma,

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participation, written notice, programs and services class size/waiver, age range/waiver, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent/adult student access, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of locations.

The on-site monitoring visit did not identify any additional areas of need.

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 those few areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.