

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

District: Haddon Heights Public Schools

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: January 14, 15, 16, 2004

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Haddon Heights Public Schools conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Haddon Heights Public Schools 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 Haddon Heights Public Schools 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 Seventh Avenue School on October 9, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the many different programs they have implemented in their district such as the guided reading program which the district has implemented with Rowan University. This program allows teacher to group children according to there reading level and allows students to begin reading novels at their own level. Teachers

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record the strengths and weakness of students to assist them in progressing to higher levels of reading.

The district has also worked with Rowan University to implement Everyday Math. This program provides all students with instructional strategies to find answers through a discovery style of learning.

The district has a support group called S.T.E.P.S. (Special Teacher, Exceptional Parents and Students). This is a support group for parents, teachers and child study team members who are concerned about and involved with children in the Special Education Services Program in the Haddon Heights School District and community. Meetings are held monthly where a variety of topics are discussed with guest speakers.

Part One Data Summary:

A review of the district's 2001 preschool data indicates nearly 78% of the preschool students are placed in self-contained programs. The district identified this as an area of need and addressed these concerns through their improvement plan. For students age 6-12 years data indicate that 60.8% of the students with disabilities are placed in settings with access to general education for more than 80% of the day. This is well above the state average of 42% and is an area of strength for the district.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessments, and Graduation Requirements 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development. 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, counseling goals and objectives, provision of programs, insufficient staff, transfer procedures and procedures to ensure the proper functioning of

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hearing aids worn by students in the district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address extended school year and counseling goals and objectives. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address provision of programs, insufficient numbers of service providers and procedures regarding hearing aids and transfer students because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures and the effectiveness of the redeployment of staff. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation of in-class support programs.

Area of Need:

Implementation of In-class Support Programs – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that in-class support at the elementary level is generally provided by an instructional aide and at the secondary level in-class support can be provided by an instructional aide or a special education teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a teacher of the handicapped provides in-class support. In the event the student could derive educational benefit from the program with the assistance of an instructional aide, the IEP should indicate general education with an instructional aide. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notice of meeting, notice in native language and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, attempts to secure parent participation at meetings, provision of due process hearing rules, provision of procedural safeguards, written notice and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address surrogate parents and attempts to secure parent participation at meetings. **The district did not submit an improvement plan to address independent evaluations and must now do so. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address written notice because it lacks activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure the provision of written notice. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address provision of procedural safeguards because timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met and the plan lacks an administrative oversight component. The district needs to identify new timelines and include an oversight mechanism.**

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

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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 child find, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the prereferral process, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines. During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that the district has already implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of identification meeting timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the prereferral process, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings because it lacks activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are consistently completed by the time of the identification meeting and that pre-referral interventions are consistently documented and reviewed to determine the effectiveness of the interventions. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments and acceptance and rejection of reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of concerns because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that functional assessments include a summary of interventions attempted prior to referral and that a written rationale is provided to parents when a report is rejected. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 meeting participants, criteria, statements of eligibility, and signatures of agreement and disagreement rationale.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to meetings. **The district's improvement is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent application of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access responsibility to IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, IEPs not consistently containing goals and objectives or benchmarks that address all identified special education needs, IEPs provided to parents prior to the implementation of programs and program changes made but not reflected in the IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address considerations and required statements. **The district did not submit an improvement plan to address goals and objectives and must now do so. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the provision of IEPs to parents because the plan identifies the correction of this area by 2005. The district needs to revise their plan and identify a more reasonable timeline. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address program changes because the district did not identify activities or an administrative oversight component to ensure an IEP meeting is convened and written notice provided prior to implementing any changes to a student's IEP. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 decision-making process, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for students placed out-of-district. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of interests and preferences, age 16 needed transition services and student and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of age 14 transition service needs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding agency invitation and courses of study.

Area(s) of Need:

Agency Invitation – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that in the statement of needed transition services in the IEP it identifies the agency who will have responsibility for implementing activities however that agency is not in attendance and there is no documentation that they were ever invited.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that agencies that will be identified by the district to provide transition services are invited to transition meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure knowledge on the part of the agency regarding the services that agency will be required to provide. Furthermore, should the agency fail to provide those services, the district will have had the opportunity to develop an alternate plan regarding the needed transition services.**

Courses of Study – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although the IEP identifies courses of study, they are not aligned with the student's interests and preferences.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure courses of study are aligned to the student's interest and preferences. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student is afforded the opportunity to achieve his/her desired post-secondary outcomes.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and early intervention programs to preschool disabled by age 3.

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During the self-assessment process the district identified a need to create a preschool disabled program within the district. That program was opened in September 2003.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional behavioral assessments/behavioral intervention plans and manifestation determination meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that all components of a functional behavioral assessment are included and that manifestation determination meetings are conducted when there is a change in placement. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and out of district participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation – During record review and staff interviews it was determined that written notice of graduation is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students and parents are informed that graduation is a change of placement.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, group size for speech therapy and home instruction.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of insufficient child study team personnel, case management responsibility, insufficient high school personnel, consultation time and class size. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of concerns because they identified the barriers but did not identify activities to bring about compliance. The plan needs to be revised to include activities and an administrative oversight component.**

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets and documentation of locations of records. 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.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Haddon Heights School District on January 14, 15, 16, 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 that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with revisions will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas 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. They also expressed their satisfaction with the level of collaboration with the child study team. They are very pleased with the ability to e-mail teachers and Child Study Team members at the high school level.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included reevaluation, statewide assessments and graduation requirements.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications consent, notice of meeting, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, child find, direct referrals, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement rationale, present level of educational performance, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, teacher access responsibility to IEP, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aides services, regular education access, interest and preference, age 16 needed transition services, student invitation, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention programs to preschool disabled by age 3, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, graduation requirements, age range group size for speech therapy, home instruction, parent adult access and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, extended school year, counseling goals and objectives, provision of programs, provision of service providers, proper functioning of hearing aides, transfer students, surrogate parents, written notice, independent evaluations, provision of procedures safeguards, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents, consideration and required statements, IEPs to parents prior to implementation, goals and objectives, notification/participation of out of district students, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, age 14 transition service needs, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, class size, consultation time and access sheets and documentation of other locations of records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding in-class support, agency invitation, courses of study and written notice of graduation.

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