

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Hamburg Public School District

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: December 20, 2005

Monitoring Team: Michelle Fenwick, Jenifer Spear, & Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Hamburg 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 Hamburg Public 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 Hamburg 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 and 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, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district's percentage of classified students, 12.5%, was below the state rate of 14.61% for that same year. The district educated 54% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Although this rate is slightly higher than the state average of 41.9% for that year, it should be noted that there are not consistent in-class support options available for special education students in math or language arts when needed. Additionally, the

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district has placed nearly all three and four year old preschool students with disabilities within the district's self-contained special education program for preschoolers or out of district placements. The district identified these issues as non-compliant and developed improvement plans to address the areas of need.

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
- Procedural Safeguards
- Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)
- Reevaluation
- Eligibility
- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessments
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas within the remaining sections were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. The areas were reviewed regarding students who are eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and those eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted in the table.

| Section | Areas Demonstrating Compliance |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary evaluations • Educational impact statement • Standardized assessments • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators |
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities • Opportunities for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs |
| Transition to Adult Life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of "needed transition services" ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings ▪ Identification of post-secondary liaison ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student's desired outcomes |

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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 | Parent training – The district identified a need to increase parent attendance and participation in IEP meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and parent training activities. | X | | |
| Evaluation | Functional assessments – The district identified a need to have consistent functional assessments conducted within the CST evaluations. | X | | |
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | Continuum of programs, placement decisions based on students’ individual needs and documentation of LRE decisions – The district identified a need to provide a full continuum of placement options for preschool students with disabilities (PSD) as well as students K-8. | X | | |
| Transition to Adult Life | Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” – The district identified a need to develop and document activities of individual assessment for post-secondary outcomes, procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that the IEPs include all required transition components. | X | | |

Additional Areas of Need

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Hamburg Township School District on December 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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will appropriately address areas of non-compliance. 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's percentage of classified students, 12.5%, was below the state rate of 14.61% for that same year. The district educated 54% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Although this rate is slightly higher than the state average of 41.9% for that year, it should be noted that there are not consistent in-class support options available for special education students in math or language arts when needed. Additionally, the district has placed nearly all three and four year old preschool students with disabilities within the district's self-contained special education program for preschoolers or out of district placements. The district identified these issues as non-compliant and developed improvement plans to address the areas of need.

During interviews conducted with parents by telephone, some indicated concern regarding full continuum of placement options while many others expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. Parents indicated that this district maintains ongoing communication with parents of students who are placed out of district, which included mailing newsletters and event calendars in order to ensure awareness and access for all students.

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, Procedural Safeguards, Location, Referral and Identification (LRI), Reevaluation, Eligibility, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessments, Graduation and Programs & Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: multi-disciplinary evaluations, educational impact statement (ESLS) standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators, opportunities to access general education, notification of and participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities for students educated outside of the district, age 16 IEP statement of needed transition services, identification of post-secondary liaison and activities, student and agency invitation to IEP meetings and annual goals and benchmarks related to the student's desired outcomes.

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Areas of need originally identified by the district during the self-assessment process which are considered to have sufficient plans to be verified included: parent training, functional assessments, continuum of programs, placement decisions based on students' individual needs, documentation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) decisions and beginning at age 14, IEP statement of transition service needs.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process and no revisions to the district's improvement plan are required. Verification of implementation of the plan will be conducted by the County Office of Education.