

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

District: Hardyston Township

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: May 10 and 11, 2004

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Hardyston Township School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Hardyston Township 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 **Hardyston Township School District** developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted on-site monitoring activities to review 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 Hardyston Township Middle School on May 6, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a modified desk audit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including interviews with the speech therapist, child study team members and administrators. Further interviews were conducted with parents by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan which will appropriately address all areas of need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its commitment to infusing technology across the curriculum. All classrooms have two computers; there is a computer lab in addition to several classroom mini-labs. Teachers have been trained in Innovative Design for

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Education, a program that trains teachers to incorporate the computer and the internet in their lesson planning. Special education students participate in regular classroom enrichment activities with the Gifted and Talented program teacher.

The district recognizes the importance of reading skills and has trained three special education teachers on Project Read.

The Reach Project run by the Guidance Department coordinates activities to provide extra help to students experiencing academic difficulty in an effort to avoid unnecessary referral to special education.

Data Summary:

The district is commended for the provision of special education services to students in the least restrictive environment. A review of the Part I data indicates that 44.4% of the preschool students are educated in a general education setting. This is well above the state average of 24.7%. Of students ages six to twenty-one, though the percentage of students provided services more than 80% of the day in the general education setting was slightly lower than the state average, the rate for students in general education 40-80% was well above the state average, 53.5% as opposed to 30.9%. These data also show an upward trend in students placed in general education more than 40% of the school day; 80.4% in 2000, 90.7% in 2001 and 93.1 % in 2002.

The district's commitment to professional development appears to have had a positive effect on the reported data. All teachers have been trained in the core curriculum content standards and though only a small number have been trained in instructional strategies and adaptations for students with disabilities, effective inclusion education, and effective positive behavioral supports and interventions, the district is committed to training all teachers in these areas. The district's commitment is evidenced by the implementation of activities to increase opportunities for professional development.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition to Preschool, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, and Student Records 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, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff development. The district has initiated activities that have increased the opportunities for professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services of speech, occupational and physical therapy, length of day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of counseling, transfer students and facilities. The district's opening of a new middle school has corrected the facilities issues and increasing the psychologist and the social worker to full time status has corrected the counseling issues. A new procedure for handling transfer students was instituted in June 2003 and has corrected the noncompliance.

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

Section III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of content and provision of written notice, content and provision of notices of meetings and meetings. The district initiated activities to bring these areas into compliance in June 2003.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district initiated activities in June 2003 and this area is now compliant.

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

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of bilingual evaluations, acceptance or rejection of reports and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments and written reports. Record review determined that activities have been implemented to bring these areas into compliance.

Section VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, criteria, signatures of agreement or disagreement and a space for the rationale.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of eligibility for specific learning disability, lack of space for testing and provision of the evaluation reports to the parents ten days prior to the meeting. The opening of the new middle school has provided sufficient space for testing. New procedures were implemented in the fall of 2003 to provide evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meeting and to document the eligibility for specific learning disability. Implementation of these activities have resulted in the correction of these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, considerations and required statements for students eligible for special education and related services, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety-day timelines and teacher access and knowledge.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements for students eligible for speech and language services only, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards and provision of the IEP to parents. New procedures were implemented in September 2003 to provide a draft copy of the IEP to parents at the conclusion of the IEP meeting. As of April 2004 all academic areas are aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient address the two remaining areas.

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 age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, agency involvement and age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of student and agency invitation. The district has initiated activities to bring this area into compliance.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consultation and case management time. The district has increased the psychologist and social worker to full time status to bring this area into compliance.

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 Hardyston Township School District on May 10 and 11, 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 all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will 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 some of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas determined by the school and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data showed an upward trend in the number of special education students placed in general education more than 40% of the school day - 80.4% in 2000, 90.7% in 2001 and 93.1% in 2002.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. Concerns were expressed by several parents regarding lack of testing in kindergarten that they believe could identify learning problems earlier and the lack of knowledge regarding their child's specific disability. Although special education meetings are held twice a year, parents would welcome more information on not only specific disabilities but on special education regulations. An elementary school parent expressed concerns about future opportunities in her child's school career and how to successfully pursue those opportunities.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services of occupational and physical therapy, length of day and year, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, bilingual evaluations, accept or rejection of reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, agreement or disagreement and rationale, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements for students eligible for special education and related services, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, agency involvement, age sixteen needed transition services, preschool transition planning conference, placement in program by age three, procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, choice of diploma, class size and waivers, age

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range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding staff development, related service of counseling, transfer students, facilities for testing, content and provision of written notice, notices of meetings and content, meetings, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, provision of evaluation reports ten days prior to the meeting, considerations and required statements for students eligible for speech and language services, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, student and agency invitation to transition meetings, consultation time and case management time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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