

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

District: Harrison Township School District

County: Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: September 17, 18, and 19, 2001

Monitoring Team: Mary Heade, Jane Marano

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Harrison Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self- assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Harrison 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 Harrison Township 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 Pleasant Valley School on September 12, 2001. 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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and speech therapists.

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

District Strengths:

The district has implemented a balanced literacy approach for reading and language development. The reading program provides guided reading practice in small groups and shared reading activities that model reading skills along with a writer's workshop where each student progresses at his/her own rate. This approach allows all students, including students with disabilities, to participate in literacy activities that include remedial and extension activities. Special education teachers, speech language specialists and basic skills instructors were trained to implement this program.

Harrison Township has a school wide e-mail system that allows parent-to-staff communication and teacher-to-teacher communication. The child study team is also available to parents and teachers through e-mail.

This year, the district has implemented a six-day schedule that provides the opportunity for an activity program during the school day. On one of the six days students have the opportunity to participate in an activity of their choice. The six-day schedule also alleviates some scheduling issues regarding the provision of related services when services are interrupted because of holidays, special programs, or absences.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Transition for children ages 3-5, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation (PK-6 district), 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 II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT), length of school day/year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of speech and counseling services from September thru June, length of school day for out of district students, and transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 consent, native language, and independent evaluations.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of a meeting and attempts to ensure parental participation in meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address notice of a meeting. The plan does not sufficiently address the parental participation issue because it fails to ensure these attempts are varied and documented and it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these additional activities.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents, notices, and the provision of written notice.

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not have procedures for the selection and training of surrogate parents.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the selection and training of surrogate parents.**

Notices - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district's notice of a meeting does not identify the discipline of the individuals who will be attending the meeting. Additionally, it was determined that district staff such as the guidance counselor and/or school principal were at meetings although the notice of a meeting did not identify them as participants.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that meeting participants are identified by discipline in notices of a meeting. It is recommended that the district use the sample notice formats developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (issued on September 29, 2000). The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Written Notice – During on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not provide parents with written notice whenever the district proposes or refuses to change the student's identification, classification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of FAPE.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided to parents whenever the district proposes or refuses to change a student's identification, classification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of FAPE. The improvement plan must include staff development regarding the provision of written notice and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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

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 (during the school year), health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings (including participants and timelines) for students ages 5 and above, and identification meeting timelines for students ages 3-5.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding referrals received during the summer and identification meeting participants for children ages 3-5.

Areas of Need:

Summer Referrals - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that referrals received during the summer months are not consistently addressed within the required timelines and do not have the required participants at meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that referrals received during the summer months are processed within the required timelines. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that a regular education teacher does not participate in identification meetings for students ages 3-5.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to identify the procedures that will ensure a regular education teacher attends identification meetings for students ages 3-5. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: ELIGIBILITY

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, establishing eligibility based on required criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participants at summer eligibility meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents.

Area of Need:

Evaluation Reports to Parents – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the child study team members indicated that evaluation reports are provided to parents, documentation of the provision of these reports is not maintained in student records.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents is maintained in student records.**

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, goals and objectives/core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and teacher access/knowledge of IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants for preschool IEP meetings, and the incorporation of behavioral intervention plans in IEP, and the 90 days timeline. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas because it lacks procedures to bring about required changes and an administrative oversight component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of programs and services identified in IEPs, and IEP meetings/annual reviews.

AREAS of NEED:

Provision of Programs and Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review, review of schedules, and interviews that the district does not consistently specify the type of program and services to be provided in IEPs. When programs and services were documented in the IEP, the information was often inconsistent with the program and services actually being provided. For example, interviews indicated that at times physical therapy was provided in place of occupational therapy because of the unavailability of the occupational therapist. A review of IEPs indicated resource room programs were not identified as either in-class or pullout, that counseling services were provided on an as-needed basis, without specifying the criteria that would trigger these services, and preschool speech/language therapy was provided on an integrative/consultative basis, without specifying the criteria for the provision of these types of services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs accurately document the programs and services the students are to receive. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure all programs and services are**

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

provided to students on a consistent basis. Furthermore, when it is determined a service is needed on an as-needed basis, the IEP must specify the criteria/behaviors that will serve to trigger the need for those services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.

IEP Meetings/Annual Review – During the on-site, through interviews with the child study team, teachers, administrators, and parents it was determined that the district is not scheduling sufficient time to conduct IEP/annual review meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district allocates sufficient time to conduct meetings that include a review of all required information to assist the team in determining appropriate programs and services for students. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to ensure the district has sufficient staff to conduct all mandated activities.**

Section IX: LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the individualized decision-making process, documentation of IEP considerations, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, participation in nonacademic and extra-curricula activities, and continuum of placement options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of regular preschool placement options for students with disabilities, and participation of out-of-district students in non-academic and extra-curricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The district must revise their improvement plan to include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.

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 procedures, maintaining the same disciplinary standards for students unless identified in the IEP, behavioral intervention plans and functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative educational settings, and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of suspension tracking and documentation to the case manager. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it

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

lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan must be revised to include these components.

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, age range, group size for speech, aides, home instruction approvals and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of a class description for their preschool special education class. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding resource programs.

Area of Need:

Resource Programs – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs did not specify whether the program would be offered in a general education setting or as a pullout program. Additionally, it was determined that pullout support and pullout replacement programs were being provided at the same time and by the same teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the IEP identifies where the resource program will be provided. The district is further directed to ensure replacement and support instruction are not provided by the same teacher at the same time. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: STUDENT RECORDS

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, documenting access to pupil records, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of student records.

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

Area of Need:

Documentation of Location of Student Records – During the on-sight monitoring it was determined that central files do not document the location of other files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

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

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Harrison Township School District on September 17, 18, and 19, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to self-identify almost 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 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. The district had already identified during the self-assessment process many of the concerns that were raised by the parents during the focus group meeting.

Areas identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, evaluation, reevaluation, transition for children ages 3-5, statewide assessment, and graduation (PK-6 district).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of related services, length of the school day for out-of-district students, transfer students, notices, meetings, meeting participants, 90-day timelines, IEP components and required statements, regular education options for preschool students with disabilities, nonacademic/extra-curricular activities for out-of-district students, discipline, and preschool special education class descriptions.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding procedural safeguards, location, referral and identification, eligibility, IEP components and required statements, program and services, and student records.

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 the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.