

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: High Point Regional School District

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: October 28 and 29, 2004

Monitoring Team: Carol Raff, Sue Wilson, Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the High Point Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the High Point Regional 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 High Point Regional 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.

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 High Point Regional High School on October 6, 2004. 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 developing opportunities for students with disabilities to learn all content areas addressed in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. One course, entitled 'Conversational Spanish,' introduces students with disabilities to basic fundamentals of the language. This course emphasizes conversational skills necessary for communicating with peers and community members.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Students with disabilities have the opportunity for support with homework through an after-school program. The district encourages inclusion in general education wherever appropriate. Students with severe disabilities learn with peers through a model where general education teachers and peers come to special education classrooms for instruction in the areas of art, world languages, computers, literature through music, sewing and foods. Curricula are adapted to enable all students to learn together.

The district's special education department and international award winning technology department have partnered to create many program options that include students with disabilities. Students enrolled in these programs have the unique opportunity to demonstrate their skills in international competitive events. One special education student placed first in the state for his robotic design in the Panasonic Design Competition.

Data Summary:

The High Point Regional School District reports a classification rate of 14.88%, which is below the state average. The district also reports that 46.8% of students receiving special education are placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day. This is slightly above the state average of 41.6% for 2003. 36.3% of the students spend between 40 and 80% of the day with general education students as compared to the state average of 30.3%. In contrast to the state average of 17.3%, the district places 11.9% of students receiving special education in general education classes less than 40% of the school day. The district indicates that as a regional high school district, a high percentage of students come from the sending districts already receiving special education and related services. The district has however, doubled the number of students declassified and returned to general education from the school year of 2000-2001 to 2002-2003. The percentage of students with disabilities who dropped out of school has averaged between 5% and 6% for the past two years. The district has identified this as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan for students at risk for dropping out. The district has also addressed through an improvement plan the need to increase participation in activities related to post-school outcomes to facilitate transition to adult life.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Free, Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Location, Referral and Identification, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline and Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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 compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the comprehensive desk audit, additional areas of need were identified regarding functional assessment, written reports dated and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Areas of Need:

Functional Assessment – A review of records indicated that a structured observation of the student in other than a testing situation was not documented within one of the initial evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that all required components of the functional assessments are addressed in student evaluations. Implementation of these activities will ensure that sufficient information is available for eligibility determinations regarding the impact of any suspected disability on the student's learning in the classroom. The plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure implementation of activities.**

Written Reports Dated – A review of records indicated that although evaluative reports were signed, they were not dated by the individual(s) who conducted the assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that each written report shall be dated by the individual(s) who conducted the assessment. The plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure implementation of activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure that information from timely evaluations will be used in making eligibility decisions.,.**

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that child study team members do not document acceptance or rejection of evaluation reports from outside agencies and do not provide a rationale when a report is rejected.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that reports from outside agencies are reviewed and accepted or rejected and that a rationale for any rejection of a report is documented. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any report or part of a report that was rejected by the child study team and**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

reason(s) why it was rejected. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activity.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identify compliance in the areas of meetings and participants, criteria and statement of eligibility and dissemination of a copy of evaluation reports to parents and adult students ten days prior to meeting.

Areas of need identified during the on-site visit are signatures of agreement and disagreement with the eligibility decision and the rationale.

Area(s) of Need: Agreement/Disagreement with Eligibility Decision

Signatures of Agreement and Disagreement Rationale – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that signatures of agreement or disagreement with the eligibility decision, and any reason for disagreement, were not documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that each eligibility meeting participant documents in writing whether the eligibility decision reflects his or her conclusions, and if it does not, that a statement of his or her conclusions is provided. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of this activity.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of required statements for students eligible for speech and language services, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents ninety day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews indicated the district does not document the provision of written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents or adult students will be provided with written notice of graduation. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents and adult students are aware that upon graduation the student is no longer eligible for special education. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activity.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of parent and adult-student access to records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

No additional areas of need were identified.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the High Point Regional High School District on October 28 and 29, 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 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, with minor revision, 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.

The High Point Regional School District reports a classification rate of 14.88%, which is below the state average. The district also reports that 46.8% of students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms for more than 80% of the school day. This is above the state average of 41.6% for 2003. 36.3% of students receiving special education spend between 40 and 80% of the day with general education students as compared to the state average of 30.3%. In contrast to the state average of 17.3%, the district places 11.9% of students receiving special education in general education classes less than 40% of the school day. The district indicates that as a regional high school district, a high percentage of students come from the sending districts already receiving special education and related services. The district has, however, doubled the number of students declassified from the school year of 2000-2001 to 2002-2003. The percentage of students with disabilities who dropped out of school has averaged 6% for the past two years. The district has identified this as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan for students who are at risk for dropping out.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with a number of the district's programs and services. A majority of the parents praised the district for enabling their children to have access to placement in the least restrictive environment. One parent felt that the district made every effort to integrate her daughter into general education classes and others were satisfied with the in-class support programs. Other parents expressed their dissatisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, particularly in the area of meeting their children's emotional needs. They felt that smaller classes were needed to address their children's academic needs. Several parents praised the efforts of the district in preparing their children for transition from high school to adult life. One parent stressed the need for more parents to be advocates for their children. Overall, despite some initial resistance from general education, the district's teachers were viewed as being accepting and helpful.

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, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings content and provision, written notices content and provision, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, three year timelines, planning meeting participants, meeting participants,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting, required statements for eligible for speech and language services, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access in district, notification and participation of out-of-district non-academic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services, student and agency invite, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, out-of-district participation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group size for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, IEP meeting and participants, drop out rate and post secondary options.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding functional assessments, dated written reports, signatures of agreement or disagreement and rationale for rejection of outside reports, and written notice of graduation.

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