

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Hillsdale School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: June 1, 2006

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Hillsdale School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hillsdale 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 Hillsdale School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an onsite monitoring visit 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 onsite 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 phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district educated 80.9% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was significantly above the state average of 42% for the same year. Additionally, the district educated 52.4% of preschool students with disabilities in the general education setting, which was above the state average of 14% for the same year. The district's classification rate for the 2005-2006 school year was 11.93%, not including students who were eligible for speech-language services, which was below the state rate of 14.85% for that year.

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Sections Demonstrating Compliance

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 onsite 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:

- Reevaluation
- Statewide Assessments
- Transition to Preschool
- Graduation
- Transition to Adult Life
- Programs & Services
- Discipline

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

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

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation • Provision of programs • Provision of related services • Transfer procedures
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation without undue delay • Provision of notice of a meeting • Meetings • Notices in native language • Interpreters at meetings • Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find Ages 3-21 • Referral process • Direct referrals • Identification meeting timelines • Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary evaluations • Educational impact statement (ESLS) • Standardized assessments • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale • Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Implementation dates

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP provided to parent prior to implementation • Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP • Annual reviews completed by June 30 of students' last year in preschool • Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district • Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs • Continuum of programs • Placement decisions based on students' individual needs

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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 table identifies those areas where the improvement plan developed by the district was sufficient and those areas that were corrected prior to the onsite monitoring visit. The district must continue to implement oversight to ensure ongoing compliance for those areas in which noncompliance was corrected.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
General Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent training- The district has identified a need to conduct a needs analysis for parents and conduct parent training. 	X	
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extended school year (ESY) – The district did not have a procedure that established criteria for providing ESY. 		X
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent –Consent was not obtained to release records to outside specialists. ▪ Content of notice of a meeting –All notice form letters did not include the required components. ▪ Content of written notice - All notice form letters did not include the required components. 		X X X
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions – Procedures were not current; implementation is inconsistent and the process is not clearly understood by all staff members. ▪ Health summary – There was no procedure for ensuring that the health summary was forwarded to the CST prior to identification meetings. ▪ Vision and hearing screenings - There was no procedure for ensuring that vision and hearing screening results were forwarded to the CST prior to identification meetings. 	X	X X
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Functional assessments – There was no procedure for conducting functional assessments. 	X	

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants – There was no procedure for documenting meeting participants. ▪ Eligibility criteria – There was no procedure for conducting appropriate testing for students referred for communication impairments. ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents – There was no procedure for distribution of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. 	X	X
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP required considerations and components – The district IEP did not include all required components. ▪ 90-day timelines – Initial evaluations and initial IEP implementation did not occur within required timelines due to high caseloads and insufficient time for case management. 	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of LRE decisions – The district identified a lack of training for appropriate documentation of placement decisions. 	X	

No additional areas of need were identified during the onsite visit.

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Summary

Onsite special education monitoring was conducted in the Hillsdale School District on June 1, 2006. 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 all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about compliance. The district is further acknowledged 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.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district educated 80.9% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was significantly above the state average of 42% for the same year. Additionally, the district educated 52.4% of preschool students with disabilities in the general education setting, which was above the state average of 14% for the same year. The district's classification rate for the 2005-2006 school year was 11.93%, not including students who were eligible for speech-language services, which was below the state rate of 14.85% for that year.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff.

Sections identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included:

- Reevaluation
- Transition to Preschool
- Transition to Adult Life
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessments
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included:

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation
- Provision of programs
- Provision of related services
- Transfer procedures
- Implementation without undue delay
- Provision of notice of a meeting
- Provision of written notice
- Meetings
- Notices in native language
- Interpreters at meetings
- Independent evaluations
- Child Find ages 3-21
- Referral process
- Direct referrals
- Identification meeting timelines
- Identification meeting participants
- Multi-disciplinary evaluations
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)
- Standardized Assessments
- Bilingual evaluations
- Written reports prepared by evaluators
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale

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- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
- IEP meeting participants
- Implementation dates
- IEP provided to parent prior to implementation
- Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP
- Annual reviews for preschool students with disabilities are completed by June 30 of their last year of eligibility for a preschool program
- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
- Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district
- Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs
- Continuum of programs
- Placement decisions based on students' individual needs

Areas of need originally identified by the district, but determined to have been corrected prior to the onsite monitoring visit by the NJDOE, included:

- Extended school year
- Consent
- Content of notice of a meeting
- Content of written notice
- Health summary
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Eligibility meeting participants
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding:

- Parent training
- Pre-referral interventions
- Functional assessments
- Eligibility criteria
- IEP required considerations and components
- 90-day timelines
- Documentation of LRE decisions

No additional areas of need were identified during the onsite monitoring visit. The improvement plan submitted by the district is approved. Verification of correction of noncompliance identified during self-assessment will be conducted by the county office of education within six months of receipt of this report.