

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

District: Hillside Township School District

County: Union

Monitoring Dates: December 13, 2004 and May 13, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Hillside 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 Hillside Township 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 Hillside Township 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 Hillside High School on December 13, 2004.

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. 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, and child study team members.

Data Summary:

The Hillside School District has a classification rate, excluding speech-only students, of 11.15%, which is slightly below the state average of 14.13%. In 2002 only 2 of the 347 students eligible for special education were placed in general education for more than 80% of the day. That number rose to 7% (32 of 402) in 2003. and to 10.4% (32 of 402) in 2004. While the number of students placed in general education for more than 80% of the day has increased over the past three years, the district realizes that further progress

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is necessary. As a result, the district has developed an improvement plan to further expand opportunities for students to be educated with nondisabled peers.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation requirements and statewide assessment 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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, provision of adapted physical education and provision of counseling. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of consent, content and provision of notices of a meeting, content and provision of notice of a meeting, surrogate parents and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and the revision of the IEP without convening the IEP team. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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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 compliance in the areas of child find procedures, direct referrals from parents and staff, health summary, vision and hearing screening and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and identification meeting participants. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 signed and dated reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students referred for speech and language services, acceptance or rejection of reports and conducting the initial assessment by at least two evaluators. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of three-year timelines, planning meeting participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th for those students exiting preschool. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of criteria, statement of eligibility, and signatures of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of eligibility meeting participants and copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority and copies of IEPs to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meeting participants, considerations and required statements, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process, documentation of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment and notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of supplementary aids and services and continuum of program options. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of age 14 statement of transition service needs and student and agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preference and interest survey and age 16 statement of needed transition services.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age 3. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written notice of suspension to case manager, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans and provision of services on the 11th day of removal from school.

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 compliance in the areas of class sizes and age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of program description. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

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An additional area of need was identified regarding the contracting for services for students with severe disabilities. The district has hired a private agency to provide teachers and administrative staff for classes for these students. The agency is not approved to provide these services by the New Jersey Department of Education..

- **The district must cease providing programs and services to students with severe disabilities through a contract with a private agency without approval from the Department of Education. The district must develop an improvement plan that includes activities to transfer responsibility for these programs and services to district staff unless the private agency seeks, and is granted, approval by the New Jersey Department of Education. An oversight mechanism must be included to ensure continued compliance.**

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of other locations of records. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 Hillside Township School District on December 13, 2004 and May 13, 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 commended for a comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment process,

Ten parents attended the focus group meeting held on December 13, 2004. Most of the parents were satisfied with the special education and related services being provided to their children in the Hillside Township School District. Parents indicated that they attend IEP meetings and participate in the decision-making process. One parent indicated that more services were needed to support students in general education prior to being referred to the child study team. Another parent indicated that more teacher training was necessary, especially for general education teachers participating in the inclusion program.

Graduation Requirements and Statewide Assessment were determined to be areas demonstrating compliance with all standards by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of notices of a meeting, content and provision of notice of a meeting, surrogate parents, independent evaluations, child find procedures, direct referrals from parents and staff, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meeting timelines, signed and dated reports, bilingual evaluations, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination, statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, IEPs to parents, decision-making process, documentation of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic, extracurricular activities, age 14 statement of transition service needs, student and agency invitations, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled, class sizes and age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, requests for access to records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, extended school year, provision of adapted physical education, provision of counseling, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, revision of the IEP without convening the IEP team, pre-referral interventions, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students referred for speech and language services, acceptance or rejection of reports, conducting the initial assessment by at least two evaluators, three-year timelines, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th for those students exiting preschool, eligibility meeting participants, copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, IEP meeting participants,

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considerations and required statements, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, consideration of supplementary aids and services, continuum of program options, preference and interest survey, age 16 statement of needed transition services, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age 3, written notice of suspension to case manager, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, provision of services on the 11th day of removal from school, program description and documentation of other locations of records.

No additional areas of need were identified during the self-assessment process. The improvement plan submitted in June 2004 to the Office of Special Education Programs will be reviewed for approval. Verification of the implementation of the plan will be conducted by the County Office of Education.