

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

District: Hoboken Public School District

County: Hudson

Monitoring Dates: January 12, 13 and 14, 2004

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Gladys Miller, Carol Raff, Jenifer Tucci-Spear and Sue Wilson

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Hoboken Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hoboken 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 Hoboken Public 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 Hoboken Board of Education on January 5, 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 instituting the annual Preschool Health Fair in collaboration with Head Start and St. Mary's Hospital. The health fair affords all children between the ages of 3-5 the opportunity to receive free comprehensive health

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screenings that include hearing, vision, body coordination, podiatric, speech and dental exams.

The district is also commended for their collaboration with UMDNJ. The dental clinic program provides services for special needs students. The services include free cleaning and screenings. The district provides transportation to the University Hospital on a weekly basis.

The district is further commended for receiving a number of competitive grant awards. These awards include:

- The 21st Century Community Learning Centers addresses the needs of all students. Through this grant, all students in grades four, five, nine and ten are involved in both academic and recreational activities that include reading and math enrichment classes, technology-based classes, character building classes, and theater arts and life skills programs.
- The NJ Reading First program is geared toward the needs of primary school students, including students with disabilities, at the Wallace Primary School. Students receive a daily reading block to help them acquire the necessary skills to achieve reading mastery. The district has also established a partnership with the New Jersey City University (NJCU) where professional development for Reading First is available for district staff.
- The Family Friendly Center program at the Brandt Middle School provides a number of services to students with disabilities that include arts and science, social services, counseling and parenting sessions for all parents and guardians of students ages five through thirteen.

Hoboken is the awarded school choice district for Hudson County and services special needs students from neighboring communities by providing program options not available within the student's home district.

Data Summary:

The Hoboken School District reported a classification rate of 17.9% (excluding students' eligible for speech and language services). Compared to the state's average of 13.4%, this number is significantly higher. The district indicated the numbers may have increased because they have improved their child find activities.

In 2002, the district's data reflected that 24.5% of the special education population spent more than 80% of time in general education. 45.1% are in general education for 40-80% of the day. The district has identified least restrictive environment and pre-referral interventions as areas of need and has developed an improvement plan to address concerns in these areas. Additionally, the district has developed activities that include in-service training for psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors focusing on social skills training for at-risk students and consultant services on specific behavior management strategies to increase the opportunities for disabled students to be educated with their nondisabled peers. The district also included activities in their improvement plan to address staff development in the area of learning styles because they believe this may be contributing to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

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The district data for 2002 listed 27.8% of the early childhood students in general education. This percentage is higher than the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Statewide Assessments 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 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, provision of occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of speech services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meeting, written notices, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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, direct referral, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and summer referrals.

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 multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized and functional assessments, signed and dated written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of overrepresentation of minority students in special education. **The district's improvement plan will be reviewed by members of the Office for Civil Rights as well as the NYU Equity Center and the Office of Special Education Programs.**

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting, participants at planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, PLEP statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines and teacher access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meetings and participants, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines and teacher responsibility for implementing IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation dates.

Area(s) of Need:

Implementation Dates for Annual Review IEPs – During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that nearly all annual reviews are conducted during the last few months of the school year. Though the IEP includes the program that will be implemented in September, it does not include a program that will be implemented from the date of the annual review to the end of the current school year. As a result, the previous IEP exceeds the allowable twelve month period of time. Additionally, these students do not have a valid IEP in place for the last few months of the school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure annual review IEPs include the program and services the students will receive through the end of the school year as well as the program and services for the coming school year. Implementation of the procedures will ensure that students have a valid IEP from the date of the annual review to the beginning of the new school year as well as the next school year. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, LRE documentation and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements and supplementary aids and services, regular education access and nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district identified scheduling issues and the lack of notification to out-of-district parents as the barriers to compliance. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services and student and agency invitations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas, specifically through the creation and implementation of the transition coordinator.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior improvement plan, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP requirements, out-of-district participation and written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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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 and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time, description of classes and staff vacancies. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in the specific area of staff vacancies.

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 Hoboken School District on January 12, 13 and 14, 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 this review the district was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some 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 and for the implementation of activities that have resulted in the correction of some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Although only two parents were in attendance both shared positive experiences regarding the district's attentiveness to the needs of their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of occupational, physical and counseling, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement rationale, IEP considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, teacher access, individualized decision making, oberti factors, continuum of programs, preschool transition planning conference, placement in program by age three, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group size for speech, home instruction, access and request for student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of speech services, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meeting, written notices, notices in Native Language, interpreters at meetings, summer referrals, overrepresentation, reevaluation timelines, eligibility participants, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, IEP meetings and participants, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher responsibility, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, out of district participation, nonacademic and extra curriculum participation, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, age sixteen transition service needs, student and agency invite, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments and behavior improvement plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, consultation time and staffing.

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The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding implementation dates for annual reviews.

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