

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Hope Township School District

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: April 8 and 9, 2003

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills and Janet Wright

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Hope School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hope 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 Hope 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 Hope Elementary School on March 31, 2003. 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 the Buddy Programs that enable older students to serve as role models as they work and interact with younger students.

The district also provides after school enrichment activities for all students such as the reading club, open computer lab, math and language enrichment and tutoring.

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Another program offered by the district is the two year grade level cluster looping structure. Greater continuity for teachers and students is established as students remain with the same teachers through a two year cycle.

The district has an extremely active PTA that serves to provide a large number of parent volunteers to assist in the school and in the numerous enrichment assemblies.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

FAPE, Location Referral and Identification, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline, 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 themselves compliant 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 professional and parent development. 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.

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, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site monitoring, interviews indicated that the district does not have a procedure to select and train surrogate parents in the event one is needed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include a procedure for the selection and training of a surrogate parent in the event one is needed.**

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Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and the acceptance or rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that related service providers are including eligibility determinations in their evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure individual assessment reports do not include eligibility determinations that may only be made by an appropriately configured IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, implementation dates, annual and ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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 this area.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, and home instruction.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the program description.

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Area(s) of Need:

Program Description– During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district has developed an “At Risk” preschool program that it considers a general education program. However, the class is taught by a teacher of the handicapped, hired in that capacity, and is composed of all preschool disabled students. The district also has a general education preschool class that allows regular education access for the preschool disabled youngsters as the groups are integrated for a variety of activities throughout the school day. Both programs follow the general education curriculum.

- **The district will provide the county supervisor of child study with a program description that identifies the at risk class as a preschool disabled class.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of the student records policy. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address this area as it lacks in-service training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training to ensure the compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of other location of records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Hope Township School District on April 8 and 9, 2003. 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 that review the district was able to identify all but a few areas 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 as well as the implementation of activities to bring about correction in some of the areas 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. A parent expressed a concern with whether the scope of evaluations addresses all areas of suspected disabilities. Parents voiced concerns regarding lack of consistent communication and follow-up between the child study team and parents. Another parent was concerned about consistent implementation of the entire IEP at some grade levels.

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, related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meetings and participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance or rejection of reports, all reevaluation, all eligibility, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, individualized decision making, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, all transition, discipline statewide assessments, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development and parent training, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards and staff knowledge of the student records policy.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding procedures for selection and training of a surrogate parent, written reports, class description and documentation of other locations.

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