

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Lakeland Regional High School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: February 4, 5 and 6, 2002

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills, Mitchell Badiner, Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Lakeland Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self- assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Lakeland Regional High 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 Lakeland Regional High School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the school on January 29, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district should be commended for providing a four-year, school-wide, school to career program. The district was awarded the New Jersey Best Practice for School to Career Initiative in June 2001.

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The district should also be commended for the End Racism and Sexism Everywhere Program (ERASE). The program was started several years ago with a \$10,000 grant from a major corporation. The program is provided as an extracurricular activity designed to teach character education, eliminate racism and sexism, and to promote awareness and tolerance. ERASE has provided a model that other districts in New Jersey have emulated. There are a number of ERASE chapters in New Jersey now. The district should also be commended for the varied extracurricular activities offered to all students.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation and Discipline were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, professional development and dissemination of IDEA information.

An area of need was identified during the parent focus group and the on-site visit regarding parent training.

Area of Need:

Parent training - Parent interviews during the on-site visit indicated that parents would like the opportunity to participate in training sessions and/or workshops on a variety of special education issues.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it provides parent training on issues where such training is warranted. The plan must include a needs assessment and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services (speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy), transfer students, length of school year and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of length of school day and facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding counseling as a related service.

Area of Need:

Counseling - On-site record review and interviews with staff determined the district does not consistently consider counseling as a related service for students who may require this service as a result of behavioral or emotional difficulties identified in their IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure counseling services are considered and provided to those students when behavioral and/or emotional issues are identified in IEPs and when the IEP team determines such services are required to address these needs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notices of meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Area of Need:

Consent - On-site record review and staff interviews indicate that documentation of parental consent to implement initial IEPs or consent for immediate implementation of IEPs was inconsistent.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parental consent is obtained to implement initial IEPs and to implement annual review IEPs and reevaluation IEPs immediately. The plan must include a mechanism to document this consent. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of Child Find, referral process, health summaries and hearing and vision screenings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district needs to revise the plan to include these components. The district has also identified a concern regarding discipline for students during the initial referral and evaluation process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting timelines.

Area of Need:

Identification Meeting Timelines - During the interview process and record review it was determined that the district does not conduct identification meetings within the twenty-day timeline.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings are conducted within twenty days of receiving a referral. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of sufficient staff to complete evaluations within the 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. To further address this issue, the district has hired additional staff.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the acceptance and rejection of reports.

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Area of Need:

Acceptance/Rejection of Reports - A review of student records as well as staff interviews indicated that there is no consistent procedure for the acceptance or rejection of outside reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the acceptance or rejection of reports, in part or in their entirety. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines and planning meetings.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the documentation of the participants at reevaluation planning meetings.

Area of Need:

Participants at Reevaluation Planning Meetings – During the on-site, it was determined that although both special and general education teachers indicated they participated in meetings, that participation was not documented in student records.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of teacher participation at meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with a severe discrepancy formula and the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan did not address these areas. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of participation of teachers. This issue was addressed in Section VI.

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VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation of vocational technical staff at IEP meetings, alignment of goals and objectives to core curriculum content standards (CCCS), and age of majority. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. The district further identified concerns regarding teacher knowledge and access to the IEP and provision of a copy of the initial IEP to parent/adult student prior to its implementation. The district's plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation dates and the required considerations and components in IEPs for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS).

Areas of Need:

Implementation Dates – During the on-site, a review of student records indicated the district does not consistently document implementation dates.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district identifies the implementation date in the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

IEP Required Statements/Considerations – During the on-site, a review of records indicated the IEP for students eligible for speech and language services does not contain all required statements and considerations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs for students eligible for speech and language services contain all required considerations and statements. It is recommended that the district use the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

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IX. LRE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of use of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Oberti factors and considerations/documentation of individual decision-making. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding out-of-district student participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

Area of Need:

Non-Academic/Extra Curricular Participation - During the on-site, staff indicated that students in out-of-district placements are notified of selected programs/activities instead of affording them the opportunity to participate in all activities in which in-district students participate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students in out-of-district placements are afforded the opportunity to participate in activities within the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

X. Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency involvement, age fourteen preferences/interests and needed transition services at age sixteen.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding student and agency invitations to transition meetings. The district's plan does not address this concern. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district further identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs and courses of study. The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks in-service training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The district will revise its plan to include these components.

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

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XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, IEP documentation and approved accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern in the area of alternative assessments. The district's plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it does not indicate that they will adopt the Alternative Proficiency Assessment developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The district will revise its improvement plan to include this activity.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding home instruction approvals.

Area of Need:

Home Instruction - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated the district does not obtain approval from the county office prior to implementing a program of home instruction.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district obtains approval from the county office of education prior to implementation a program of home instruction. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other student records maintained by the district.

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Area of Need:

Documentation of Location Student Records - A review of central files indicated the district does not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure central files identify the locations of other student records maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lakeland Regional High School District on February 4,5,6 and 7, 2002. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. A concern regarding parent training was expressed during the focus group. Parents further indicated they would like to see additional information regarding special education procedures and programs incorporated into the Teacher's Hand Book. Some parents indicated the district needed to raise the awareness level of general education teacher regarding individual student needs. During parent interviews, a concern was raised regarding a limited number of available elective classes for special education students the high number of cases assigned to case managers.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general policies and procedures, professional development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of related services, length of school year, transfer students, certifications, surrogate parents, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, referral processes, summer referrals, participants at identification meetings, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, eligibility, reevaluation timelines and planning meetings, eligibility meetings, annual review timelines, supplementary aids and services, regular education access and continuum, agency involvement in transition, age fourteen and sixteen transition service needs, discipline procedures, participation in statewide assessment, accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, graduation requirements, class/age waivers, group sizes for speech, parent/adult student access, access sheets, and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding length of school day, facilities, notices of meetings, Child Find, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, ninety-day timeline, participants at reevaluation meetings, criteria for SLD, provision of evaluation reports to parents, participation of vocational/technical staff, consideration and required statements in the IEP, alignment of goals and objectives with CCCS, age of majority, provision of IEP to parent prior to implementation, teacher knowledge and access to IEP, Oberti factors, individualized decision-making, nonacademic/extracurricular participation for out-of-district students, student invitation to transition meeting, and alternative assessment.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training, counseling, consent, identification meeting timelines, acceptance/rejection of reports, participants at eligibility meetings, implementation dates of IEPs, required considerations for ESLs IEPs, home instruction approvals and documentation of alternate location of student records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.