

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

District: Laurel Springs School District **County:** Camden

Monitoring Dates: February 18 and 23, 2005

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Laurel Springs School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Laurel Springs 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 assist the district in identifying areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Laurel Springs 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 Laurel Springs Elementary School, on February 9, 2005. 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialist and child study team members.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Data Summary:

A review of data submitted by the Laurel Springs School District, as a result of the self-assessment process, indicates that over the last four years the district's classification rate has been higher than the state classification rate. However, the district's classification rate decreased from 18.2% in 2001 to 16.21% in 2003. The state classification rate for 2003 was 14.35%. For 2004, the district reported a classification rate of 17.21% (73 of 377 students), including students receiving speech and language services, compared to the state classification rate for that year of 16.58%. The percentage of students with disabilities (ages 6 to 21) participating in general education instruction for more than 80% of the day was above the state rate at 58.2% for that year. This represents an increase from a rate of 42.4% reported for the 2002-2003 school year.

A total of 37.5% of students with disabilities, ages 3 to 5, participated in general education programs during the 2004-2005 school year.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies and procedures.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent training and dissemination of IDEA information. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the area of dissemination of IDEA information. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of parent training because it does not address the barriers identified in the self-assessment. The plan needs to be revised to include activities to address the barriers.**

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

Area of Need:

Staff Development - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that training is required for speech-language specialists who assume case management responsibilities for students classified as eligible for speech and language services. Areas of need identified include, but are not limited to, case management, required components of a written report and IEP, code requirements regarding the referral and identification of students and the development and implementation of the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure speech-language specialists who assume case management responsibilities are trained in all relevant areas of special education regulations and district procedures. Implementation of these activities will facilitate the provision of a free, appropriate public education to students eligible for speech and language services. The plan must**

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

include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of activities.

Section II: Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding transfer students, related services and extended school year.

Areas of Need:

Transfer Students - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that student records do not consistently document the date a student eligible for speech and language services transfers into the district. As a result, an immediate review of evaluation information and the IEP could not be verified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district conducts an immediate review of the IEP and evaluation material to ensure the student receives services consistent with the IEP or if needed, conducts an evaluation and develops a new IEP or modifies the existing IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the student receives the required services that will allow the student to benefit from his/her special education program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Provision of Speech Language Services - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through the interview process determined that, prior to the visit, the district had been without a speech-language specialist for an extended period of time. As a result, speech therapy was not provided during that time. Compensatory services may be required for students. This must be determined on an individual basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district develops and implements a procedure to determine the need for compensatory speech services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the student is provided the required related services to benefit from instruction. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that the description of the extended school year program does not provide sufficient information regarding implementation dates, frequency and

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

duration of services, the program to be implemented and goals and objectives. As a result, review of a student's IEP by a parent, teacher, case manager, related service provider or administrator would not provide a clear understanding of the service(s) required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required components of the extended school year program are documented in the IEP to ensure full implementation of the required services. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, notices in native language, independent evaluations and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notice of meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of surrogate parent because it lacks in-service, and an administrative oversight component. In addition, the date for implementation must be adjusted to reflect a more timely correction of noncompliance. The plan must be revised to include these components.** On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the area of notice of meeting.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding consent, notice of meeting, written notice and the provision of N.J.A.C. 6A and 1:6A.

Areas of Need:

Consent - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that consent is not consistently obtained for the initial evaluation and implementation of the initial IEP for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure consent is obtained at times prescribed by regulations for students ESLS. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the parent is informed of the action proposed by the district and is provided the opportunity to consent or not consent to those activities. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Notice of Meetings - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that, for students eligible for speech and language services, notice of meeting does not consistently inform the parents of the purpose of the meeting, the right

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

to invite others with expertise, participants and document the provision of the document entitled, Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure notice of meeting for students ESLs contains all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice of meeting forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Written Notice - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that for students eligible for speech and language services, written notice is not consistently provided within 15 days of a proposed action.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written notice for Students ESLs is provided to the parent within 15 days of a proposed action. It is recommended that the district adopt the written notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Provision of N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A – During the onsite monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that parents of students referred for speech and language services are not consistently provided with copies of N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A when a determination is made to conduct or not conduct an initial evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the provision of the due process hearing rules and special education rules as required. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the parent is fully informed of special education rules and the process to be implemented when there is parental disagreement regarding identification, evaluation, reevaluation, classification and educational placement. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district also accurately identified compliance in the areas of pre-referral interventions, identification meetings and timelines for students eligible for special education and related services.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find and referral process. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants and speech and language identification meeting timelines.

Areas of Need:

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that the speech-language specialist does not consistently attend identification meetings conducted for preschool students and students suspected of having a communication disorder.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the speech-language specialist attends identification meetings conducted for preschool students and students suspected of having a communication disorder. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Identification Meeting Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that referral information submitted for students eligible for speech and language services does not consistently document the date of referral and the date of receipt of the referral. As a result, identification meeting timelines could not be verified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure referral dates and the date of receipt of the referral for speech and language services are documented. Implementation of these activities will ensure that 20 day timelines are met. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports for students eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech and language functional assessments and content of the written report.

Areas of Need:

Functional Assessment - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review indicated that teacher interviews, structured observations and informal

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

measures were not consistently documented in the written report prepared by the speech-language specialist.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure functional assessments completed by the speech-language specialist contain all required components. The plan must include in-service for speech-language specialists and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Multi-disciplinary assessments - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that written information from the classroom teacher is not obtained to document how the speech issues impact academic functioning. This information must be obtained by the speech-language specialist and reflected in the written speech-language evaluation report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written reports prepared for students eligible for speech-language services include a statement regarding how the speech issues impact the student's academic functioning. Implementation of these activities will ensure that services are provided only when there is an educational impact. The plan must include in-service for the speech-language specialist and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of three-year timelines. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the area of three-year timelines for students eligible for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of need for three-year timelines for students eligible for speech and language services.

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

Area of Need:

Planning Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that special education teachers do not consistently attend reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required participants attend reevaluation planning meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

participants, who have knowledge of the student and programs, are involved in the decision making process. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, criteria, participants and statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services. The district also accurately identified compliance in the areas of participants for students eligible for speech and language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks sufficient administrative oversight activities required to bring about corrective action and continued compliance. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meetings and documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services.

Areas of Need:

Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that the district does not consistently document meetings conducted to determine eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services. As a result, meetings could not be verified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district conducts and documents meetings to determine eligibility for speech and language services and includes the required participants. Implementation of these activities will ensure that meetings are conducted with the appropriate decision makers in attendance and that all considerations and decisions regarding determination of eligibility are documented. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Documentation of Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that the district does not consistently document the determination of eligibility in student records maintained for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district documents the determination of eligibility in student records for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the speech or language disorder meets criteria and requires instruction by a speech-language specialist. The plan will also ensure written documentation of**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

the considerations and decisions in determining eligibility. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, implementation dates, goals and objectives, annual reviews conducted by June 30th and teacher knowledge and responsibility for IEPs. For students eligible for special education and related services, IEP components, present levels of educational performance (PLEP), Core Curriculum Content Standards, 90-day timelines and meeting participants were compliant.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech and language IEP components, meeting participants and 90-day timelines.

Areas of Need:

IEP Components – During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that the speech and language IEP does not contain all required components.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the speech and language IEP contains all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the speech and language IEP developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review determined that participants attending the speech and language annual review meeting were not consistently documented. As a result, meeting participants could not be verified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the speech and language IEP contains documentation identifying participants attending the speech and language annual review meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

90-Day Timelines - During the on-site monitoring, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that 90-day timelines could not be verified for students eligible for speech and language services due to a lack of consistent documentation of the date of parental consent to evaluate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs for students eligible for speech and language services are implemented within 90 days of parent consent to evaluate. Implementation of the activities will ensure that there is no delay in the**

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

determination of eligibility and development and implementation of the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance, for school-aged students, in the areas of individual decision making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, documentation of decisions regarding general education placement, continuum and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool general education access and decision making. The barriers identified by the district are facility limitations and funding. **The district's improvement plan is not sufficient because it lacks activities to address both of the identified barriers. The plan must be revised to include activities to address barriers identified in the self-assessment.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

The Laurel Springs School District serves students through grade six. Transition to post school requirements are not applicable

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of implementing the IEP no later than age three for students classified as preschool disabled.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participation in the early intervention to preschool transition planning conference. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedural safeguards, manifestation determination, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plan and functional behavioral assessment and interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of notification of removal to the case manager. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of participation, accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Laurel Springs School District serves students through grade six. High school graduation requirements are not applicable.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age range, class size, group size for speech, home instruction and common planning time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of program descriptions. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of location of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of providing the parent with a list of the locations where student records are maintained. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Laurel Springs School District on February 18 and 23, 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 the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with some revision, will bring about systemic change.

The Laurel Springs School District reported a classification rate of 17.21% (73 of 377 students) in 2004, including students receiving speech and language services, compared to the state classification rate for that year of 16.58%. The percentage of students with disabilities (ages 6 to 21) participating in general education instruction for more than 80% of the day was 58.2% for that year, which was above the state average. From 2001 through 2004, the district's classification rate has remained above the state classification rate.

A total of 37.5% of students with disabilities, ages 3 to 5, participated in general education programs during the 2004-2005 school year.

Parent input regarding services provided by the district was obtained at a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit and through parent telephone contact. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents were in agreement that programs were developed on an individual basis and challenged their children. Students had current IEPs and parents were confident that staff had knowledge of their responsibility in implementing their IEPs. Parents expressed satisfaction with the smooth transition to preschool and when a student transfers into the district. Parents are involved in the decision making process and their input is welcomed.

Areas identified as consistently compliant for both students eligible for special education and related services and eligible for speech and language services by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, meetings, notice in native language, independent evaluations, interpreters at meetings, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, age range, class size, group size for speech, home instruction, common planning time, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of location of records.

Furthermore, for students eligible for special education and related services, areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included transfer procedures, consent, pre-referral identification meetings, interventions and timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, eligibility meeting participants, IEP components, meetings, implementation dates, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, Present Level of Educational Performance, annual reviews conducted by June 30th, teacher knowledge, 90-day timelines, meeting participants, annual review timelines, school age individual decision making, continuum,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

considerations and documentations, decision making regarding least restrictive environment, participation in non-academic and extra curricular activities, implementing preschool IEPs by age three, disciplinary procedural safeguards, manifestation determination, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessment, interim alternative setting, statewide assessment accommodations and modifications, participation and documentation.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are dissemination of IDEA information, child find activities, participation in the early intervention to preschool transition planning conference, program descriptions and provision of a list of locations where student records are maintained. In addition, areas identified by the district and corrected prior to the on-site OESP visit for students eligible for special education and related services include notice of meeting, pre-referral interventions, three year timelines and notification of removal to the case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified additional areas of need regarding parent training, the provision of speech and language services, surrogate parents, provision of evaluation reports to parents and preschool general education access and individual decision making.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards for students eligible for special education and related services regarding extended school year and meeting participants. Areas of need were identified for students eligible for speech and language services within the various standards regarding staff development, related services, transfer students, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, provision of special education code and due process hearing rules to parents, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, written reports, documentation of acceptance or rejection of written reports, reevaluation planning meeting participants, meetings, documentation of eligibility, IEP components, IEP meeting participants, and 90-day timelines.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Laurel Springs School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.