

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

District: Lawrence Township School District

County: Cumberland

Monitoring Dates: May 5, 7, 9, 2003

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Lawrence 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 Lawrence 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 Lawrence 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 Myron L. Powell Elementary School on May 1, 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 therapist and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides a Natural Helpers Program for all students. This program provides peer counseling, anger management sessions, and enhances student leadership. A trip to Mount Misery is included in the program. The district also provides the Pupil

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Enhancement Program which is a basic skills program that increases “time-on-task” behavior.

The district also provides the Character Education Program which rewards positive behavior and the successful implementation of short-term and long-term goals.

The district also provides an after-school program to enhance reading and language arts skills. This Foundations Program is funded through a grant.

The district also sponsors Powell Pride, the school newspaper that has won national awards. This paper includes students with disabilities on its staff.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, 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 provision of programs, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, goals and objectives for related services, and transfer students. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site, it was determined the district has implemented activities that brought about correction in the area of goals and objectives included in IEPs for speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy prior to the monitoring visit. The district further identified concerns in the area of hearing aides. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 provision of notices of meetings, meetings, and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and independent evaluations. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

provision of written notice and parental requests. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan must be revised to include these components. It should be noted that although content of notices of meetings was originally identified as an area of need, it was corrected prior to the on-site visit.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding parental consent, written notice and native language.

Areas of Need:

Parental Consent/Participation/Provision of Notice – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review that when a parent does not attend the IEP meeting, the district implements the IEP immediately without providing the parent with written notice. As a result, the parent is not afforded the opportunity to consider the district's proposals for 15-days.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides the parent with written notice that affords the parent 15 days to consider the proposed actions prior to implementation of the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Native Language - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although the district provides notices of meetings and the identification meeting evaluation plan in the parents' native language, they are not providing written notice in the native language for eligibility conferences and IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district sends written notice of all meetings and decisions in the parents' native language, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find 3-21, pre-referral interventions, direct staff and parent referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the identification meeting timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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 evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of acceptance and rejection of reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, and signatures of agreement, disagreement rationale.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting.

Area of Need:

Provision of Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that copies of evaluation reports are not consistently provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility conference.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that copies of evaluation reports are consistently provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility conference. 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, considerations, age of majority, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, and teacher access and responsibility.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP), goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), and annual review timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP meeting participants, implementation dates of IEPs, and provision of goals and objectives.

Areas of Need:

IEP Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that special education teachers are not attending initial IEP meetings and that regular education teachers are not attending IEP meetings for students in the behaviorally disabled self-contained class even when these students are or may be participating in general education classes.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that special education teachers attend all initial IEP meetings and that regular education teachers attend all IEP meetings for students in the behaviorally disabled self-contained class when students are or may be participating in general education classes. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Implementation Dates - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district is inappropriately identifying implementation dates that are earlier than the actual conference dates in an attempt to demonstrate compliance with annual review timelines.

- **The district will immediately cease the practice of identifying inaccurate implementation dates on IEPs. The district will also revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure annual reviews are conducted within one year of the previous review. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Development of Goals and Objectives - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that when special education teachers cannot attend the IEP meeting, goals and objectives are not developed. Instead, they are provided to parents and staff members 15 days after the IEP meeting. As such, there is no discussion regarding these goals and objectives.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that goals and objectives are developed and discussed at the time of the IEP meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, decision-making process, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum of programs. The barriers included space and scheduling problems. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of continuum of programs. The district further identified concerns in the areas of notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. **The district did not submit improvement plan activities for these areas and it needs to do so.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests survey, age 16 needed transition services, and student and agency invitation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Courses of Study - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district's IEP does not include an area to identify courses of study when developing transition plans.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure courses of study are identified and included in the IEP as a component of the student's transition plan. The plan must include training for the child study team and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding preschool transition planning conference.

Area of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews that a child study team member does not consistently participate in the preschool transition planning conference for students who will be aging out of early intervention programs. District personnel report that they are not notified of these meetings so they are unable to participate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a mechanism to establish procedures with the early intervention providers to ensure participation in the transition planning conference. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternate educational settings, and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation to case manager. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 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 area of class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the area of consultation time. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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

Area of Need:

Home Instruction - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record reviews that approval for programs of home instruction were not obtained from the county office.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that home instruction approval is obtained from the county office prior to implementing that program. The plan needs to include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lawrence Township School District on May 5, 7, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. No concerns were raised during the focus group meeting.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of programs, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, provision of notices of meetings, meetings, interpreters at meetings, child find 3-21, pre-referral interventions, direct staff and parent referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement, disagreement rationale, IEP meetings, considerations, age of majority, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, decision-making process, regular education access, age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests survey, age 16 needed transition services, student and agency invitation, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternate educational settings, procedural safeguards related to discipline, class size waivers, age range waivers, and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, goals and objectives for related services, transfer students, hearing aides, surrogate parents, content of notices of meetings, provision of written notice, independent evaluations, parental requests, identification meeting timelines, acceptance and rejection of reports, required statements and Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) in IEPs, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), annual review timelines, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, early intervention programs to preschool disabled by age three, discipline documentation to case manager, consultation time, and class descriptions.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parental consent, written notice, native language, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, provision of IEP goals and objectives,

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

implementation dates, decision-making process for LRE, preschool transition planning conference, documentation of courses of study, and home instruction approvals.

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