

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

**District:** Lawrence Township School District **County:** Mercer

**Monitoring Dates:** June 10 and 11, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Stephen A. Coplin, Deborah Masarsky and Georgianna Parlacoski

***Background Information:***

During the 2000–2001 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, 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 New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on May 20, 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 and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The district includes special education students in the following unique programs:

The “Book Publishing” program paired 7<sup>th</sup> grade general education and special education students with two established authors for the purpose of writing and publishing

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

a book about an Internet mystery. The authors sent rough drafts of each chapter to the teacher who then shared them with their students who rewrote parts and made suggestions on what would be a “real” reaction by an adolescent. The students wrote the ending and illustrated the book. Students were listed as authors and a book signing was held at a local bookstore.

The “Middle School Newspaper” project includes special education students who interview people and write articles for the newspaper.

The “School Store” program “employs” special education students to sell items provided by other special education students. Money management is the goal of this program.

The “Peer to Peer” leadership program was instituted to develop leadership qualities in students and to allow adolescents to voice their opinions on topics of importance to them. This group consists of a diverse population, including special education students. Students are trained to lead groups of their peers in discussions surrounding topics such as drugs/alcohol use, conflict mediation, dating and other adolescent issues.

The “Mentor” program at the high school supports students both academically and socially. All students who present a need for mentoring become part of this program.

The “Homework” program provides a structured setting in which special education students can do homework assignments and receive direction or tutorial support by special education teachers.

### ***Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:***

**General Provisions** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site.

### ***Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)***

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of frequency/duration of related services, length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, provision of related services and transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding location of related services and goals/objective for counseling.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Location of Related Services** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently document the location of related services in IEPs.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of related services is documented in the IEP. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Goals/Objectives for Counseling** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently develop goals/objectives for counseling services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that counseling goals/objectives are developed and included in the IEPs of students determined eligible to receive counseling as a related service. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, consent, provision and content of district notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, participants at all meetings, documentation of attempts at parental participation and independent evaluations. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding child find activities, the district's referral process, direct referrals, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings and the 20-day timeline for convening an identification meeting. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern with the over-representation of minority students in special education. The district's improvement plan will be reviewed and technical assistance will be provided by the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office for Civil Rights in accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MOU).

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding standardized assessments and limited English proficiency assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern regarding non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate assessments. The district's improvement plan will be reviewed and technical assistance will be provided by the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office for Civil Rights in accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MOU).

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the assessment process for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments for special education programs/services and written reports for students eligible for special education programs/services.

### **Areas of Need:**

#### **Assessment Process for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services (ESLS)**

– During the on-site monitoring, interviews with speech therapists and file review indicated that although evaluations are conducted, speech therapists do not develop evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech evaluation reports are developed subsequent to conducting assessments. The written reports must include the educational impact statement from the classroom teacher as well as the required components of a functional assessment. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Functional Assessments** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through staff interviews and file review that functional assessments for students eligible for special education programs and services do not contain interventions by the classroom teacher and others who work with the student.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain the required components identified in NJAC 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Written Reports** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that although evaluators develop and sign evaluation reports, these reports are not consistently dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all evaluation reports are dated. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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

**Section VI:   Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding three-year reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and reevaluation of preschool students by June 30<sup>th</sup> of the last year of the program. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section VII:   Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding eligibility meetings, criteria for Specific Learning Disability, documentation of the eligibility statement and copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section VIII:   Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and present levels of educational performance.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding required statements, goals/objective/CCCS, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, copies of IEPs to parents, observation of proposed programs, teacher responsibility/access and implementation of IEPs as written. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring.

**Section IX:   Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, general education access within the district and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment the district identified concerns regarding the documentation of LRE considerations/required statements, notification/participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities and program/IEP changes made

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

without convening an IEP meeting. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding transition from early intervention program to preschool disability program by age three (3). The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding invitations to students/agencies, shared-time vocational personnel/agency representative participation at transition meetings, agency failure to participate at meetings and/or to provide services and the documentation of: Statement of Needed Transition Services, Transition Service Needs Statement, student interests/preferences, courses of study, desired post school outcomes and post school liaison. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding discipline procedures that include notification to case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards to potentially disabled students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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

**Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the statewide assessment process that includes student participation, approved accommodation/modification, IEP documentation, alternate assessments and the SRA process. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section XIII: Graduation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding IEP requirements, choice of diplomas and out-of-district student notification/participation in graduation exercises/activities within district. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding written notice of graduation.

**Areas of Need:**

**Written Notice of Graduation** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents/adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents and adult students are provided with notice of graduation and that this provision is documented in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, provision of consultation time, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding program descriptions. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding group size for resource programs.

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

**Areas of Need:**

**Group Sizes for Resource Center Programs** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that group size for resource programs exceeds code limits.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that group size for resource programs complies with code requirements. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding parent/adult student access, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of student records and the documentation of location of other student records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.



# New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lawrence Township School District on June 10 and 11, 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 exceptionally 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 is sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their concerns regarding inconsistencies in the delivery of services, financial constraints which have a negative effect on the provision of programs/services, lack of communication from classroom teachers, scheduling barriers which prevent the provision of needed services, notification to out-of-district students of extra-curricular activities within district, training of aides, lack of social skills instruction, lack of extended school year programs offered in district, implementation of IEPs and lack of space to provide services. Some parents expressed satisfaction with the district's child study teams, district programs and the open communication between home and the school. The district had already identified during the self-assessment process some of the concerns that were raised by the parents during the focus group meeting. Parents also commented that they had formed a special education parent advocacy group to provide support and information.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment included policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, staff development, length of school year/day, facilities, certifications, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, statement of present level of educational performance, individual decision making process, General education access within district, continuum of programs, preschool transition planning conferences, class size, age ranges, provision of consultation time for teachers and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, provision of related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, parental consent, provision/content of all notices, independent evaluations, notices in native languages, interpreters at meetings, required participants at meetings, timelines, child find, referral process, vision/hearing screenings, health summaries, standardized assessments, limited English Proficiency assessments, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluation of preschool students by June 30<sup>th</sup> of the student's last year in program, eligibility meeting, SLD criteria, documentation of the eligibility statement, copies of evaluation reports/IEPs to parents, observation of proposed programs, IEP required statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, IEP implementation dates, IEP teacher access/responsibility, IEP implementation as written, LRE documentation, mortification to out-of-district students of extracurricular/nonacademic activities within district, program changes without convening IEP meetings, transition from EIP to preschool disability program by age three(3), transition to post school, discipline procedures, statewide assessment process, graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out-of-district notification/participation in graduation exercises/activities within district, program descriptions, parent/adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of student records and documentation of location of other student records.

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

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding location of related services, goals/objectives for counseling, multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, written notice of graduation, and group size for resource programs.

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 the areas of need identified during the on-site visit.