

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

Leonia School District

Bergen County

Monitoring Dates: November 27, 28, 29, 2001

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright, Susan Smahl and Damen Cooper

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Leonia School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Leonia 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 Leonia 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 on November 5, 2001. 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 its Student Transition Experience Program (S.T.E.P.), which is an intensive transition program for high school students with disabilities. In addition the district should be commended for its development of the Senior Quad Program which is a required program of four courses that focuses on the development of life skills.

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It was further noted that the district is willing to explore a variety of options in order to provide professional development to enhance the training of their staff members. Other areas of strength include the Keep On Track Program, a specialized writing program, and the district's overall commitment and acceptance of students with disabilities.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, and Graduation 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 extended school year, provision of occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling and transportation services, length of school day/year, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of speech therapy, transfer students and facilities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified an area of concern regarding the use of related service personnel and resource room teachers as substitute teachers when general education teachers are absent resulting in the district's inability to provide services to classified students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 area of consent, notices of meetings, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, provision of written notice and native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find and health summary. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified a concern regarding the PAC/pre-referral intervention process. The developed improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures for the documentation of interventions, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified their compliance in the areas of standardized assessment, functional assessment, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations and bilingual evaluations. 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 visit involving written reports.

Area of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring a review of records indicated that some child study members were including eligibility statements in their written reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure written reports do not include eligibility statements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component.**

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting an eligibility meeting, participants, and giving a copy of evaluation reports to parents.

During self-assessment, the district identified areas of concern regarding the criteria for specific learning disability. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consideration/required statements, age of majority, and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding annual review timelines, development of IEP within 90 days for preschool disabled and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified an area of concern regarding alignment of goals/objectives to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS). The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need 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 elements.

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

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, considerations and documentations, Oberti factors, regular education access and nonacademic/extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding documentation of program changes in the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding the use of supplementary aids and services to consider

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regular education as an option and the preschool continuum. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address these areas of need 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 elements.

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

Section X: Transition

Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition service needs and needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student/agency invite, agency involvement and documentation of student's preferences/interests in the IEP. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address these areas. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance in these areas.

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

Transition from Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding attendance at the preschool transition planning conference. The district indicated that they are not always invited to these meetings by the early intervention program. The district did not develop an improvement plan to address this issue. The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district further identified concerns regarding transition from early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components to ensure compliance.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary Of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking and manifestation determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding documentation of suspensions to the case manager, development of behavioral intervention plans and functional behavior assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding discipline procedures and interim alternative education settings. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in statewide assessment and documentation in the IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding accommodations/modifications, alternate assessment and child study team knowledge of content of statewide assessments. The district has developed an improvement that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding home instruction IEPs and class descriptions. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding access sheets and staff knowledge of student records procedures/policies. 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 visit regarding documentation of locations of other records maintained by the district.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Other records - A review of records indicated that central files do 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 students records maintained by the district as required by N.J.A.C. 6:3.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Leonia School District on November 27, 28, 29, 2001. 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 self-identify almost 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, participants expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Specifically, there was overall satisfaction with the district's commitment to and exercising of inclusion practices from the preschool level and through high school. In response to some reports of problems affecting particular students, the district indicated their awareness and responsibility to resolve those situations. There were few, if any, systemic problems identified at the focus group meeting.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included maintaining policies and procedures, parent and staff development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of occupational, physical therapy, counseling and transportation, length of school day/year, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals, referral process, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants and timelines, standardized assessments, functional assessments, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation participants and planning meeting, turning age five, eligibility meetings, copy of evaluation reports to parents, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentations, student access to regular education, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, age fourteen transition service needs, course listing, age sixteen needed transition services, suspension tracking, manifestation determination, statewide assessment participation, statewide assessment IEP documentation, graduation, class size, age range, group sizes for speech, parent /adult student record access and student record maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of speech therapy, transfer students, facilities, surrogate parents, written notice, native language, Child Find, health summary, pre-intervention process, multi-disciplinary evaluation, bilingual evaluations, eligibility criteria, IEP participants, alignment of goals/objectives with the core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, ninety-day timeline for preschool age students, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, supplementary aids and services for preschool, continuum for preschool, preschool transition, student/agency invitation, agency involvement, preferences/interests, discipline procedures, documentation to case managers, interim

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alternative education settings, behavior intervention plan, functional behavior assessments, accommodation and modifications for statewide assessment, alternate assessments, child study team knowledge of content of statewide assessment, home instruction, program descriptions, access sheets and staff knowledge of student records policy and procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding written reports, documentation of eligibility, and documentation of location.

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.