

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Lindenwold School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: December 2, 3, 4, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin, Michael Lee, Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2002-2003 school year, the Lindenwold School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Lindenwold 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 Lindenwold 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 Lindenwold High School on October 8, 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 therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides the Fast Forward Language and Reading Program during the academic school year and summer program for students with disabilities.

The district consults with the Devereux Institute Staff Development Program to provide emotional support services to staff and students.

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The district has also implemented PowerSchool, which tracks discipline and allows parents access to their children's academic progress.

The district also developed a program called Learning Walks, in which the four building principals observe programs, services, and activities in each of the schools together in order to facilitate successful and collaborative changes.

The district has a very supportive board of education which has made it a priority to improve the special education programs and services in the district. This is a strength for a district who went through dissolution three years ago and that is still a relatively new district.

The Lindenwold School District reported a classification rate of 21.7% for the 2001-2002 school year, which is above the state average of 13.4%. These data indicated that placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is above the state average, with a district rate of 34% versus the state average of 21.7%. 51% of these students are placed in settings that do not offer access to general education. For students ages 6-21, the need to increase access to general education is an area of concern. During the 2002-2003 school year, 28% of the students eligible for special education and related services were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day; this falls below that state average of 41.6%. It should be noted that since the 2000-2001 school year, the Lindenwold School District has decreased the number of students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day by 18% and has identified access to general education as an area of concern for students ages 3-21 through the self-assessment process.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation 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 visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

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

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of goals and objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the area of extended school year. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks appropriate timelines.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of hearing aides and provision of speech and language services. It should be noted that the district corrected these areas of need prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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 surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings (content and provision), native language, parent participation, and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-referral interventions and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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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 assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting, notices, participants at planning meeting, parental consent, and turning age five.

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

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, participants, criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were 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 participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, age of majority, and 90-day timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of teacher knowledge and access and the decision-making process related to parental concerns. Parental input is not documented and they are not made to feel like members of the IEP team. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of annual review timelines. **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 must be revised to include this component.**

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site 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, Oberti, and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, and nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district does not always consider general education first and does not include students with disabilities in special area subjects because of attitude, philosophy, and scheduling conflicts. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 agency invitation, agency involvement, courses of study and preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student invitation and age 14 transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of age 16 needed transition services and partnerships with community resources. **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 this component.**

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

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age three.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Area of Need:

Discipline Procedures - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews that although there are in-house discipline procedures, staff are not implementing them consistently throughout the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include staff training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure that the district's discipline procedures are consistently implemented throughout the district. The implementation of these activities will result in appropriate procedures being applied to all students.**

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of SRA and child study team knowledge of content of assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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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, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and schedules.

During the self-assessment process, the district 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 must be revised to include this component.**

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of location of other records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lindenwold School District on December 2, 3, 4, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify all but one area 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. Parents are pleased with the communication with staff and the use of PowerSchool. Parents did express concerns with general education teachers' lack of knowledge of IEPs for students with disabilities. Parents also expressed an interest in a district support group.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Graduation.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings, independent evaluations, child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, identification meeting participants and timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meeting, notices, participants at planning meetings, parental consent, meetings for students turning age five, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, individualized decision-making, Oberti, continuum, agency invitation, agency involvement, courses of study, preferences and interests, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, schedules, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, extended school year, related services, hearing aides, content and provision of notices of meetings, native language, parent participation, interpreters at meetings, preferral interventions, vision and hearing screenings, functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, reevaluation timelines, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meetings, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and access, decision-making process/parental concerns, LRE considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and

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extracurricular participation, student invitation, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, partnerships with community resources, behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, SRA process, child study team knowledge of content of assessments, consultation time, and documentation of locations of other records.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding discipline procedures.

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