

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

**Little Falls Township School District**

**Passaic County**

**Monitoring Dates:** November 13, 14, 15, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** Janet C. Wright, Mitchell Badiner, and Damen G. Cooper

**Background Information**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Little Falls 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 Little Falls 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 Little Falls Township 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 at School # 1 on October 30, 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 taking the initiative to maintain students with autistic spectrum disorder and pervasive developmental disorder within the district by developing a specialized program to meet the needs of these students.

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Additionally, the district utilizes an integrated approach to the delivery of related services, is committed to the provision of in-service to staff as well as providing supports to parents beyond the school day. These additional supports include an evening parents group run by the psychologist and after hours home visits by the social worker and psychologist. Furthermore, the resource teachers hold groups before and after school such as "Homework Club" and "Breakfast Book Club."

**Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**General Provisions, Discipline, Transition, Statewide Assessment 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 related services, length of day/year, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of transfer students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an oversight component. The district's plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding a facility issue. This information has been provided to the county office.

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings and written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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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 Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of health summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of vision and hearing screenings. No improvement plan was submitted to address this area of need. The district needs to revise the plan by including procedures to ensure vision and hearing screenings are conducted for all students referred for evaluation.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Area of Need:**

**Written Reports** – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that individual reports include statements regarding issues that may only be determined by the members of the IEP team and not by individual evaluators. This information included eligibility determinations and the need to develop IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure individual reports do not contain statements or determinations that may only be made by a duly configured IEP team. The plan must include staff development and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

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**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Finding:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines for reevaluations for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

**Section VII: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the on-site visit, an area of need was identified regarding the documentation of eligibility.

**Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Eligibility** – A review of records indicated the district includes placement decisions in the summary of eligibility.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that placement decisions are not included in the statement of eligibility. The plan must include staff development and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, implementation dates, meeting ninety-day timelines and teacher knowledge and access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants at IEP meetings and annual review timelines for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the alignment of goals and objectives to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS).

**Area of Need:**

**Goals and Objectives/CCCS** – A review of IEPs indicated goals and objectives were typically not aligned to the CCCS. Interviews with staff indicated this is a result of the IEP computer program utilized by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure goals and objectives are aligned with the CCCS. It is recommended the district adopt the model IEP developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

**Section IV: 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 documentation, use of supplemental aids and services and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular participation for out-of-district students and the availability of a full continuum for preschool students. The district's improvement plan 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 class sizes, age ranges, group sizes for speech and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of collaborative time for special education teachers and regular education teachers and descriptions of class programs. The district's improvement plan 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/adult student access to records and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of access sheets in the student records maintained by the child study team. 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 maintenance of records and documentation of alternate location of records.

**Area of Need:**

**Maintenance of Record** – Little Falls Township School District is in a formal sending/receiving relationship with a regional high school district. As such, pupil records are forwarded to the receiving school. During the on-site visit, it was determined the district is forwarding all records and is not maintaining those records, in perpetuity, as required by N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.8(e). It was further identified the district is not maintaining records for a five-year period of time as required by N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it maintains those records required by N.J.A.C. 6:3 when students articulate to the receiving school district.**

**Documentation of Locations** - 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 student records maintained by the district.**

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**Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Little Falls Township School District on November 13, 14 and 15, 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 identify nearly 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, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents indicated there is excellent communication between the child study team members and parents and that they feel they are an integral part of their children's IEP process. Additionally, many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, provision of related services, certifications, length of school day and year, surrogate parents, obtaining consent, holding of meetings, native language and independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, participants at identification meetings, identification meeting timelines, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, copies of evaluation reports to parents, timelines for reevaluation for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation meetings, participants at reevaluation meetings, use of multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, turning age five, considerations and required statements in the IEP, supplemental aids and services, IEP implementation dates, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, individual decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, regular education access, transition, discipline process and procedures, statewide assessment, class sizes, age ranges, group sizes for speech, home instruction, parent and adult student access to records, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, transfer students, notices of meetings, written notice, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, components of functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines for students eligible for speech and language services, participants at IEP meetings, annual review timelines for students eligible for speech/language services, nonacademic/extracurricular participation for out of district students, continuum for preschool, collaboration time for teachers, class descriptions, and access sheets in student records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, documentation of eligibility, written reports, alignment of goals and objectives to the CCCS, maintenance of records and documentation of locations.

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.