

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

District: Little Ferry **County:** Bergen

Monitoring Dates: June 8, 2005

Monitor: Gladys Miller, Jenifer Spear and Stephen Coplin

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the **Little Ferry 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 Ferry School District** with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as, areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The **Little Ferry School District** developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed an on-site visit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as, reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information. Parent interviews were conducted by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, **the Little Ferry School District's** classification (excluding eligible for speech and language services) has been decreasing and is currently below the state average at 12.01%. The district places 81.4 % of their students in general education for 40-80% and more than 80% of the day which is above the state average of 71.9% for those two categories.

A total of 10.3% of students with disabilities in the district are educated in separate public and private school settings. This rate is higher than the state average of 9.4%. With regard to preschoolers, review of data indicates that the district has placed preschool students with disabilities in general education at a percentage equivalent to the state average. The district also identified the need to address student performance on statewide and standardized testing and developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirement and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the self-assessment and by the OSEP during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services of speech, occupational and physical therapy including goals and objectives, length of school day and year, certifications and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of providing counseling services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of transfer students.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings and written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the visit, it was determined that the district and has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the areas of surrogate parents, consent and notice of meetings.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the areas of Child Find and pre-referral interventions.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments (ESERS), bilingual evaluations and documentation of acceptance or rejection of outside evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments, standardized assessments (ESLS) and written reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement or disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of providing a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the visit it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

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Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings and participants, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, IEP's to parents, ninety day timelines, annual review timelines, and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of present levels of educational performance, considerations and required statements and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the visit it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of continuum of programs and decision making process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and notification of and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, consultation time, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding program descriptions and sufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of program descriptions.

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

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the **Little Ferry School District** on June 8, 2005. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 an exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about compliance. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. The district is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

For the past three years, the **Little Ferry School District's** classification rate (excluding eligible for speech and language services) has been decreasing and is currently below the state average at 12.01%. The district places 81.4 % of their students in general education for 40-80% and more than 80% of the day which is above the state average of 71.9% for those two categories.

A total of 10.3% of students with disabilities in the district are educated in separate public and private school settings. This rate is higher than the state average of 9.4%. With regard to preschoolers, review of data indicates that the district has placed preschool students with disabilities in general education at a percentage equivalent to the state average. The district also identified the need to address student performance on statewide and standardized testing and developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

A parent survey was conducted via telephone. Of the parents surveyed, all expressed satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Parents stated that their children were making progress and felt that the district and professional staff were supportive and provided many options.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified by parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services for speech, occupational and physical therapy including goals and objectives and frequency, location and duration, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, notice of meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, standardized assessments (ESERS) bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of outside reports, re-evaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and or disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, decision making process, continuum of programs, pre-school transition planning conference, transition to preschool by age 3, age fourteen transitions service needs, preferences and interests, student invitation, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards, notification to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved

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accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation requirements, class sizes and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, counseling, transfer students, surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, Child Find, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, preferral interventions, standardized assessments(ESLS), functional assessments, written reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, notification and participation in extracurricular activities, description of programs and sufficient staff.

During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the self-identified areas of professional development, transfer students, consent, notice of meetings, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting, surrogate parents, present level of educational performance, considerations and required statements, and teacher access and responsibility and program descriptions.

No revisions to the improvement plan are required at this time. The improvement plan submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs will be reviewed for final approval and forwarded to the County Office of Education. Staff from the county office will conduct verification of the areas of the plan not yet implemented.