

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

School District: Little Silver

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: February 18, 2005

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the **Little Silver 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 Silver School District** with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Silver School District** developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need identified in their self-assessment.

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 part of the monitoring process, OSEP conducted telephone interviews with parents, a comprehensive desk audit and held a public focus group meeting for parents and community members at the **Little Silver School District** on December 18, 2004. During the on-site visit student records were reviewed; classrooms were visited; and interviews were conducted with the director, child study team members, speech and language therapists, and teachers. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff OSEP that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan that will appropriately address all areas of need identified during the self-assessment process.

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District Strengths:

The district is commended for developing a variety of unique programs offered to students with disabilities:

The district offers an after school program which provides students with disabilities opportunities to participate in activities with their nondisabled peers such as a chorus and the production of a play. The **Circle of Friends** program at the Markham Place School and Point Road School's Lunch Bunch Program provides additional opportunities for the development of socialization skills through guided interactions and discussions related to friendship, awareness of feelings, and bullying. The **Point Pals Program** provides social skill development for students in grades 1 through 4. Methodology used by the school social worker and special education teachers who supervise this program include game-playing, direct instruction, modeling, and role-play. Students are encouraged to bring a friend for a portion of these activities. Generalization of these skills is emphasized throughout the school day. The **Technology Program** provides a Special Education website link for posting news and information regarding the Special Education Parent Association and provides opportunities for communication between students/ parents and teachers. The weekly meetings of the **STEP Parenting Program**, chaired by the school social worker, provide activities and practice techniques for parents to utilize at home to improve communication with their children.

Data Summary:

The **Little Silver School District's** data report indicates a continued decline in the number of students receiving special education between 2001 and 2004. The classification rate for the 2003-2004 school year was 9.5% which was considerably lower than state rate of 14.35%. During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need to reduce the classification rate further through the improvement of curriculum and instruction and the intervention and referral (I&RS) process.

The data also indicate that 56% of students with disabilities were determined eligible for special education under the category of specific learning disability (SLD). The district has identified the need to provide more opportunities for students with SLD to be educated in general education settings and increase the amount of time spent in general education for those who are there for some part of their day. To achieve these goals, the district has developed an improvement plan to address these concerns.

Finally, current data indicates that the district has been successful in its efforts to educate its students within district programs, as only 6 out of a total of 101 classified students have been placed in out-of-districts settings during this school year.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards

Reevaluation, Individualized Education Program, Transition to Preschool and Post-School, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Student Records are areas that were determined to be compliant by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies/procedures, the statement of assurances, and dissemination of public information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of in-service training for school personnel and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of programs and services, IEP documentation of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives for related services and hearing aid checks. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

An additional area of need was identified during monitoring regarding extended school year.

Area of Need:

Extended School Year - During monitoring it was determined through staff and parent interviews and record review that although extended school year is discussed during IEP meetings, the decisions are not consistently documented in students' IEPs. Additionally, when a student is found eligible for extended school year, a description of the extended school year program is not consistently included in the student's IEP.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is considered for all students at IEP**

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meetings and the criteria used to determine the provision of extended school year is identified in IEPs. Additionally, when extended school year is warranted, a description of the program must also be included in IEPs. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. As a result of these activities, students will have the opportunity to continue to progress in the general education curriculum throughout the year.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during monitoring regarding the participation of general education teachers at speech/language identification meetings and the provision of parent notice of eligibility.

Area of Need:

General Education Teachers at Identification Meetings - During monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that general education teachers do not consistently participate in identification meetings for students who are potentially eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the required participants are invited to meetings and that teachers are provided with coverage in order to attend meetings. The district's plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. As a result of these activities, the district will ensure that general education teachers are participants in the decision-making process during all required meetings.**

Provision of Parental Notice of Eligibility - During monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that written notice is not consistently provided to parents following eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that following the eligibility determination meeting, parents are provided written notice. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. As a result, parents will be fully informed of the decision-making process in determining eligibility and be provided the opportunity to exercise their due process rights if they disagree with the eligibility determination.**

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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 direct referrals from parents, and convening of identification meetings within the 20-day timeline.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, the referral process/staff referrals, pre-referral interventions, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessment, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services and acceptance/rejection of outside reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of convening of eligibility determination meetings and agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

Additional areas of need were identified during monitoring regarding termination of services for students receiving speech and language services and the statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

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Area(s) of Need:

Speech/Language Termination of Services - During monitoring it was determined through interviews with the director, speech therapists and parents that the district does not consistently convene reevaluation meetings when considering ending speech and language services for students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a reevaluation meeting is conducted prior to ending speech and language services for a student. The district's plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. These activities will ensure that the appropriate information is considered when determining the eligibility status of students receiving speech-language services.**

Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability (SLD) - During monitoring it was determined that the district does not include the specific area(s) of discrepancy when documenting the statement of eligibility for students with SLD.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the specific area(s) of discrepancy is included when completing the statement of eligibility for students with SLD. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. As a result of these activities, parents will be informed of the criteria used to determine their child's eligibility for special education and related services.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of general education access for students in kindergarten through grade 8 within the district and notification to out-of-district students regarding extracurricular and non-academic activities within district.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration/documentation of supplementary aids and services, documentation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) and increasing general education placements for SLD students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the monitoring regarding integrated preschool programs.

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Areas of Need:

Preschool Program Options - During monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and parents that the district does not provide a continuum of placements for preschool students with disabilities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that preschool students with disabilities are provided the opportunity to access general education with their non-disabled peers. The district's plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. As a result of these activities the district will be able to increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in the general education setting with their non-disabled peers.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

An area of need was identified during monitoring regarding graduation requirements for students transitioning from grade 8 into high school.

Area of Need:

Graduation Requirements - During monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not address graduation requirements during IEP meetings for students who will be transitioning into high school when their current IEP is in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district obtains input from the receiving high school regarding graduation requirements when IEPs are developed for students transitioning from grade eight into high school and document these requirements in the *Graduation* section of the IEP. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. As a result of these activities parents and students will be fully informed of the requirements the student must fulfill to receive a diploma.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class and group sizes, age range, and consultation time for teachers.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas sufficient time for case management responsibilities and provision of resource program for more than half the school day. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. It was determined that the district has begun to implement this plan.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Summary

Monitoring of the **Little Silver School District** was completed on February 4, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring, of the fourteen parents who attended, all agreed that the district provides access to general education for their children. Some parents expressed satisfaction with the district's programs and services and indicated that their children had made great strides and have acquired many new skills. Other parents suggested that the district needs to provide training for general education teachers and classroom aides in an effort to improve the quality of supplementary aids and services provided in the general education classroom. Furthermore, some parents expressed concern that their children are not being provided a free and appropriate education due to the attitudinal problems and inability of some general education staff to implement students' IEPs. There was consensus among the parents that communication between parents and district staff needs to be improved in order for parents to fully participate in the decision-making process. The district has addressed these as issues during the self-assessment process and has developed an improvement plan to address these concerns.

The **Little Silver School District's** data report indicates a continued decline in the number of students receiving special education between 2001 and 2004. During the 2003-2004 school year, the district's classification rate was 9.5% which was considerably lower than state rate of 14.4% rate. During the self-assessment process, the district indicated a need to further reduce the need for classification through the improvement of curriculum and instruction and improvement to the intervention and referral services process. The data further indicates that more than half of their current population of students receiving special education has been found eligible for special education under the category of specific learning disability (SLD). The district has identified the need to provide more general education placement opportunities for these students and to increase the amount of time spent in these placements to at least 80% of their school day. To achieve these goals, the district has developed an improvement plan to address these concerns through the provision of staff development to general education administrators and staff regarding instructional modifications and adaptations, differentiated instruction and implementation of pre-referral interventions by classroom teachers.

Finally, current data indicates that the district has been successful in its efforts to educate its students within district programs, as only 6 out of a total of 101 classified students have been placed in out-of-districts settings during this school year.

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 public information, provision of programs and services, IEP documentation of related services, transfer students, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, parental consent, content of notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals from parents, convening of identification meetings within the 20-day timeline, standardized assessments, functional assessment, written reports, bilingual evaluations, 3-year reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meeting with required participants for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluations completed by

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June 30th of s students last year in preschool, convening of eligibility determination meetings, agreement/disagreement with eligibility, Convening IEP team meetings, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, teacher IEP access/knowledge, 90-day timelines to implement initial IEPs, annual review timelines, continuum of programs and regular education access within the district for k-8 students, notification to out-of-district students regarding extracurricular and non-academic activities within the district, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention to preschool by age three, transition for students beginning at age 14, discipline procedures, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations/modification for statewide assessment, IEP documentation of statewide assessment, and the provision of the alternate proficiency assessment when appropriate, class/group size, age range, consultation time for teachers, documentation of the location of other student records on the central file and parental access to student records.

Areas of need identified by the district during the self-assessment process included in-service training for school personnel, parent training, , goals and objectives for related services, hearing aid checks, child find, the referral process/staff referrals, pre-referral interventions, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference, consideration/documentation of supplementary aids and services, LRE documentation, increasing general education placements for SLD students, sufficient time for case management responsibilities and provision of resource program for more than half the school day.

Areas of need identified during the monitoring process included extended school year, participation of general education teacher at speech/language identification meetings, provision of *Parental Notice of Eligibility*, speech/language declassification, the statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, preschool program options, and graduation requirements.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Little Silver District will develop and submit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address all areas of need identified during the monitoring process.