

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Long Branch School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: April 15, 16, 17, 2002

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky, Stephen Coplin, Barbara Tucker,
Dorothenia Boyd- Jackson, Georgianna Parlacoski

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Long Branch School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Long Branch 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 Long Branch 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 April 15, 16, 2002. 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, child study team members, building principals, vice principals, speech therapists, transition coordinator and general/special education teachers.

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District Strengths:

The district offers unique programs for special education students and their parents. The “Mentoring Program” assists students who are experiencing academic, social or emotional difficulties by providing them with mentors from Monmouth University. The “EPIC Program” provides training for parents to work with other parents in small supports groups.

The “LEAP Program” provides special education students with volunteer teachers to tutor them after school.

The “Community Tutorial Program” consists of four satellite sites throughout the community where students may receive after school instruction.

Area Demonstrating Compliance in All Standards:

Statewide Assessments was determined to be compliant in 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/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of professional staff development regarding core curriculum content standards, positive behavioral supports and social development skills. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The plan needs to be revised to include this mechanism.

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

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding extended school year, goals/objectives for speech/OT/PT, length of school day/year and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff certification, availability of nonacademic/extra-curricular activities, goals/objectives for

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counseling, program changes prior to conducting IEP meetings, implementation dates for related services, frequency/duration/location of related services, amount of instructional time for in-class support teachers and provision of related services during short-term vacancies of related service providers. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently 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 monitoring visit.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding provision of notice of a meeting to parents/adult students, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, parental consent to release student records and scheduling of meetings at mutually agreeable times. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding meetings in native language, interpreters/sign language translators, provision of written notices within timelines, notices in the native language of the parent, meeting participants and the 20-day timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Area of Need:

Content of Notices - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that district notices do not contain all required statements/components.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that district notices contain all required statements and components. The improvement plan must also include an oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding interventions in general education. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern regarding review of health/medical information. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find activities and direct referrals.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find Activities - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district's Child Find activities do not continue throughout the year to include summer months.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities continue throughout the year including summer months. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Direct Referrals - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews that the district does not have a procedure for direct referrals by teachers.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that staff have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in meetings when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the Family Support Team. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these activities.**

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Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding bilingual evaluations, standardized assessments and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding dating of written reports and analysis of instructional implications. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language service and functional assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Multi-disciplinary Evaluations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech reports do not include a written educational impact statement from the student's teacher.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a written educational impact statement from the classroom teacher is included in speech reports. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring, a review of evaluation reports indicated that for students eligible for special education and related services, functional assessments do not consistently include the interventions attempted in the general education setting. Furthermore, for students eligible for speech/language services, the required components of functional assessments varied from report to report.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain all required components identified in NJAC 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding reevaluations completed by June 30th of a students last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding three-year timelines for reevaluations and completion of requested reevaluations without undue

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delay. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding provision of evaluation reports to parents and eligibility criteria/statements. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding goals/objectives aligned with the core content curriculum standards, annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language services and provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding 90-day timelines for bilingual evaluations, present levels of educational performance statements, teacher IEP responsibilities, considerations/required statements, age of majority, measurement of students' progress and documentation of modification/supports for nonacademic/extra-curricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site regarding annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Reviews - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently complete annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services within required timelines.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district completes annual reviews within required timelines. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding provision of a full continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding individual decision-making, considerations/required statements, provision of supplementary aids/services, participation with non-disabled students in general education/nonacademic/extra-curricular activities and notification to out-of-district students of extra-curricular activities within district. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section X: Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding participation in the preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs by age three. 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.

Section X: Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district identified concerns regarding the statement of Transition Service Needs, interests/preferences, Needed Transition Services statement, student/agency invitations, agency involvement/ Interagency responsibilities, establishment of linkages and post-secondary liaisons. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding procedural safeguards of students identified as potentially disabled, documentation to case managers, tracking, short-term removals, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, interim alternative educational placement that will enable student to continue to participate in the general curriculum, return to original placement after 45-day removal and provision of parental rights. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding choice of diplomas and notification of participation in graduation activities for out-of-district students.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding written notice of graduation for out-of-district students, rationale for exemption from passing HSPA and graduation requirements.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents/adult students placed in out-of-district settings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parent(s)/adult students are provided with notice of graduation and that this provision is documented in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

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Rationale for Exemption from Passing the HSPA - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that when a student is exempt from passing the HSPA, the rationale for this exemption is not documented in the graduation requirements section of the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is exempt from passing the HSPA, the rationale for exemption is documented in the graduation requirement section of the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Graduation Requirements - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide a description of an alternate requirement for graduation if the student is exempt from meeting the standard graduation requirements established by the state and the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district includes a description of an alternate graduation requirement if the student is exempt from meeting a standard graduation requirement. The district will include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding class/group sizes, age waivers and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding apportioned time for case management responsibilities, consultation time for special education and regular education teachers and provision of sufficient counseling services. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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 plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified the need to submit a description of the team teaching model to the county office. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding maintenance/destruction.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding requests for student records, access to student records and staff knowledge of the district's student record policies/procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding access sheets in files of students eligible for speech/language services and documentation of other locations of other student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Access Sheets - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not include access sheets in the files of students eligible for speech/language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district includes access sheets in files of students eligible for speech/language services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Documentation of Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not identify in central files the location of other student records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Long Branch School District on April 15, 16, 2002. 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify 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, the thirty-eight parents that attended expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services as well as the communication among teachers, staff and parents.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, extended school year, goals/objectives for speech/OT/PT, length of school year, facilities, provision of notice of a meeting, meetings, independent evaluations, vision/hearing screenings, bilingual evaluations, standardized assessments, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in a preschool program, goals and objectives aligned with the core content curriculum standards, annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language services, provision of IEPs to parents, provision of a full continuum of programs, statewide assessment, choice of diplomas/notification of participation in graduation activities for out of district students, class/group size, age range, home instruction and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional staff development, staff certification, availability of nonacademic/extracurricular activities, goals/objectives for counseling, program changes prior to conducting IEP meetings, implementation dates for related services, frequency/duration/location of related services, amount of instructional time for in-class support teachers, provision of related services during short-term vacancies of related service providers, surrogate parents, parental consent to release student records, scheduling of meetings at mutually agreeable times, meetings/notices in native language, interpreters/sign language translators, provision of written notices within timelines, meeting participants, 20-day timelines, interventions in general education, health/medical information, dating of written reports, analysis of instructional implications, 3-year timelines for reevaluations, completion of requested reevaluations without delay, provision of written reports to parents, eligibility criteria/statements, 90-day timelines for bilingual evaluations, present levels of educational performance statements, teacher IEP responsibilities, IEP required components/considerations, age of majority, measurement of students' progress, modifications and supports for nonacademic/extracurricular activities, individual decision making, considerations/required statements, provision of supplementary aids/services, participation with non-disabled students in general education/nonacademic/extracurricular activities, notification to out-of-district students of extra-curricular activities

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within district, participation in preschool transition planning conferences, implementation of IEP by age 3, transition statements, student/agency invitations, agency involvement/interagency responsibilities, establishment of linkages, post-secondary liaisons, procedural safeguards of students identified as potentially disabled, documentation to case managers, tracking, short-term removals, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, interim alternative education settings, apportioned time for case management responsibilities, consultation time for special/regular education teachers, provision of sufficient counseling services, request for student records, access to student records and staff knowledge of the district's students record policies/procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding content of notices, Child Find activities, direct referrals, functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, annual reviews of students eligible for special education/related services, written notice of graduation, rationale for exemption from passing the HSPA, graduation requirements and documentation of other locations of student records.

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.

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