

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

District: Lopatcong

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: June 11 – June 12, 2001

Monitoring Team: Stephanie DeBruyne, Janet C. Wright

Background Information

During the 2000 - 2001 school year, the Lopatcong School District conducted a self-assessment to determine whether the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to gather and review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

In 2000, the parents and staff were invited to attend a focus group public meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Information collected by the district was the basis for its self-assessment document that cites strengths and areas of need. The district is in the process of developing activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified by the district as areas of need.

A second focus group public meeting was held in the district on May 23, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had some concerns.

District Strengths

The district has increased the participation of students with educational disabilities in general education. Students in special class programs are included in a variety of academic subjects for parts of each day with supplementary aids and services.

The district has provided opportunities on a daily basis for students to meet with a resource teacher in order to ensure their understanding and preparation of homework and assignments. This time is available during non-academic periods and has been instrumental in providing additional support as needed.

The district has implemented a system of behavioral interventions that have alleviated the regular use of suspensions.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance in All Standards

Statewide Assessments 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 I: General Provision:

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified staff development as an area of need. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified two areas of need, including the documentation of extended school year and oversight/monitoring of the use of hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the on-site monitoring, an additional area of need was identified regarding the consistency in processing transfer students.

Areas of Need:

Transfer Students – Interviews with staff indicated that a procedure is in place for processing transfer students. However, a review of records indicated inconsistency in completion of an immediate review. Documentation of registration dates, dates for requesting records, and dates the students were actually placed in programs reflected delays.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure transfer activities are conducted in a timely manner.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified surrogate parents as an area of need. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need

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

Section IV: Location, Referral, and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that its Child Find procedures, obtaining health summary information, and vision and hearing screenings are areas of need. 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 the referral process for ESLS students.

Areas of Need:

Referral Process for ESLS – A review of records as well as interviews with the staff indicated that instead of conducting an identification meeting, general education interventions, as recommended by the district's Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC), are initiated whenever a referral is made to the speech/language specialist. Staff reported that due to large caseloads, the PAC process must be used or the number of referrals would not be able to be managed by the only speech language specialist on staff.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that when a referral is received to evaluate a suspected speech problem, an identification meeting is held within 20 days of receipt of that referral. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the district has the ability to meet their increasing needs and to provide the mandated services as the district continues to expand.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding bilingual evaluations, written reports, and the documentation of interventions prior to evaluation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address the area regarding acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluation for preschool students, teacher input, and written reports for speech only re-evaluations.

Areas of Need:

Teacher Input for ESLS - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that the district did not consistently include documentation of the educational impact of the speech problem.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech-language evaluations include a statement regarding the educational impact of the speech problem.**

Multi-disciplinary Assessment for Preschool Students – Interviews with staff and a review of records of incoming preschool students indicated that the district conducts one CST evaluation and a speech evaluation, only.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that evaluations for preschool students include assessments by at least two members of the child study team, and when determined to be necessary, a speech/language assessment.**

Written Reports – A review of records revealed that the speech language specialist does not consistently complete a report after re-assessing a student during the reevaluation process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that a written report is completed after a speech/language assessment is conducted as part of the reevaluation process.**

Acceptance/Rejection of Outside Reports – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that there was an area of need regarding accepting and rejecting outside reports. The district's improvement plan only addresses accepting outside reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that if a report is rejected, a written rationale is provided to the parent.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district's self-assessment identified an area of need regarding continued eligibility at reevaluation. Improvement plan activities were sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the reevaluation planning meeting for students eligible for speech language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluation Planning Meeting – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that the district is not consistently conducting reevaluation planning meetings for students classified ESLS. Staff indicated that there is no time in their schedule to have these meetings, and as a result, calls are made to parents informing them that additional assessments may or may not be required. If required, a request for consent is sent home.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure reevaluation planning meetings, with all required participants, are conducted as part of the reevaluation process.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district self-assessment did not identify any areas of need related to eligibility.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the documentation of the determination of eligibility.

Area(s) of Need:

Determination of Eligibility – A review of records indicated the district is not documenting the eligibility statement appropriately. Instead, each team member is inserting an eligibility statement at the end of each of his or her respective report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that the IEP team makes eligibility determinations, and that these determinations are not made prior to the meeting by individual team members.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need related to IEP considerations and required statements, development of measurable goals and objectives, documentation of parent observation of a proposed placement and teacher knowledge of IEPs. 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.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**Summary of Findings:**

The district's self-assessment indicated a number of areas of need related to the individual decision-making process and supplementary aids and services. 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.

Section X: Transition**A. Transition to Preschool****Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need related to transition to preschool.

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

B. Transition from school (secondary) to post-school**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP documentation of transition service needs, needed transition services and provision of invitations to meetings to agencies involved in the transition process. 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.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations and interim alternative educational settings (IAES). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need related to programs and services with regard to exploring and developing ways to tailor programs that will address the growing needs of the student population. Improvement plan activities will not sufficiently address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding class size and age ranges.

Area of Need:

Program Types - During the self-assessment process, the district identified that the student population is changing, and as a result, programs need to be developed to address the growing needs of the community. The improvement plan proposed looking into the team teaching model. However, an additional area was identified following parent and staff interviews regarding provision of programs for students who present with more severe cognitive needs. Interviews indicated that though some programs currently address the academic needs of these students, they do not include activities of daily living. Staff and parents also indicated there was a need for additional extended school year options.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include revisions, modifications, and/or additions to programs for those students with cognitive disabilities as well as the need for additional ESY programming options.**

Class sizes/Age Ranges – During the on-site monitoring visit, class rosters were reviewed. It was determined that class sizes within the resource programs exceeded the sizes required by N.J.A.C. 6A: 14. Furthermore, a review of rosters also determined there was more than a four-year age range in some of the special class programs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that class sizes and age ranges comply with NJAC 6A: 14.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified obtaining consent to destroy records as an area of need. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Summary

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lopatcong School District

on June 11 and 12, 2001. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review it conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of the review, the district was able to self-identify the majority of areas that require improvement as well as develop a comprehensive improvement plan that with some revision should result in systemic change.

District staff were most accommodating during our visit. As indicated in the self-assessment and improvement plan, the district indicates it practices a broad-based commitment to inclusive education. This statement is supported by the large percentage of students with disabilities being educated in general education programs. Interviews with staff throughout the district further reinforced the systemic commitment to, and acceptance of, inclusive practices. The district is commended for its strong commitment to inclusive education for students with disabilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development; extended school year; hearing aid oversight; surrogate parents; child find; health summary; vision and hearing screenings; multi-disciplinary evaluations; functional assessments; written reports; bilingual evaluations; acceptance/rejection of reports; documentation of interventions; documentation eligibility; IEP components, considerations and required statements; teacher knowledge of IEPs; individualized decision making; post-school transition requirements; discipline issues; and destruction of student records.

The on-site team identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding the processing of transfer students; referral process for ESLS; determination of eligibility; the reevaluation process for ESLS; the multidisciplinary evaluations of preschool disabled four-year olds; and class size and age range.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of this monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit its improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.