

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

District: Lumberton Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: December 13 and 14, 2004

Monitor: Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Lumberton 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 Lumberton Township 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 its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Lumberton Township School District developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

As the first step to verifying the self-assessment findings, to assessing the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Lumberton Middle School on the evening of November 17, 2004. Information obtained from this meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities.

During the on-site visit, 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 administrator, building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Lumberton Township School District is commended for a commitment to technology. In 2003, the district received the NJ Technology Elite Award. This award has enabled them to establish a number of technology initiatives in the district which have had a positive impact on all students, including those with disabilities. Technology initiatives such as Smart Boards, and assistive technology for students with learning disabilities, visual impairments, and physical limitations have enabled students with

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special needs to have easier access to the general education curriculum. In addition, all students have access to distance learning opportunities and a number of extra-curricular activities have incorporated technology. Curriculum offerings in technology have also facilitated transition planning for special needs students with interests and preferences in this area.

In the 2002-2003 school year, the Lumberton Township Middle School was named a Star School for their Unified Diversity philosophy, which emphasizes high student achievement, acceptance of differences via a comprehensive curriculum, and the infusion of character education for all students, including those with disabilities. An example of this philosophy is the RATHIDAPS program. RATHIDAPS (Respect and Tolerance Highlight Individual Differences and Promote Safety) is a whole school initiative designed to foster a more harmonious school environment through mutual respect and tolerance. The district reports a positive impact on student achievement. In addition, they reported a "0" suspension rate for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years. The district has also implemented a number of character education, community service-oriented projects, and mentoring programs, all of which promote the Unified Diversity philosophy.

Data Summary:

A review of the data submitted by the Lumberton Township School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that classification rates for special education students are slightly above the state average; however, the district rate has dropped in the last year. This has been attributed, in part, to the restructuring of their Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS)/Building Support Committee (BSC) process and a more effective program of pre-referral interventions. The district anticipates that this positive trend will continue. The district further reports that approximately 57% of preschool disabled students are placed in special education settings, which is slightly above the state average.

For students ages 6 to 21, the district reports a trend toward placing more students in general education for a higher percentage of the day. Students have moved from self-contained programs to resource and inclusion programs as appropriate. In addition, the district places students in separate settings at a rate of 4%, which is significantly below the state average. The district has demonstrated a commitment to serving students in their home school environments whenever possible. Future program expansions include preschool and in-class support.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Location, Referral and Identification, Least Restrictive Environment, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, and Student Records 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.

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Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent training and discussion of general education options. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of IEP programs, procedures for maintenance of hearing aids, transfer procedures, length of school day and year, and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of extended school year. While the district's improvement plan addresses this issue for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, it does not include activities to address the issue for students eligible for speech and language services. **The improvement plan needs to be revised to ensure that this discussion occurs for all classified pupils, including those classified as eligible for speech-language services.**

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of prior written notice for students classified as eligible for speech-language services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting and provision of Parental Rights in Special Education (P.R.I.S.E.), N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A.

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Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a Meeting—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that notice of a meeting does not consistently include the required components. Notice of a meeting does not include the statement regarding the parent’s right to bring someone knowledgeable of their child’s performance in all instances when an IEP may be developed, reviewed, and or revised. This includes invitations to eligibility, reevaluation, and speech conferences.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of a meeting includes all the required components. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being informed of all instances when other persons may be involved in educational planning and ensure that the appropriate decision-makers have input into the development of an IEP. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

PRISE, N.J.A.C. 6A:14, and 1:6A—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that notice of a meeting for students eligible for speech-language services does not include a copy of PRISE. In addition, N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A are not provided to parents at the time of an initial speech referral.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents of students eligible for speech-language services receive PRISE, 6A:14, and 1:6A when required. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being informed of their rights regarding the special education process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary and standardized evaluations, bilingual evaluations, and documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of evaluation reports.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments and speech reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that a parent interview is not conducted for reevaluations when a social history is not part of the evaluation plan. In addition, a parent interview is not conducted for speech referrals.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a parent interview is included as part of the functional**

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assessment. The implementation of these activities will result in all educationally relevant information being available for consideration in determining eligibility and developing appropriate educational programs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.

Speech Reports— During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the summaries of speech evaluations include an eligibility statement. As a result, the required participants do not have the opportunity to collaborate on a decision regarding eligibility.

- **The district will ensure that speech-language evaluation reports do not include recommendations for eligibility. Eligibility decisions must be made by the participants at the eligibility meeting. The district will develop an improvement plan to include administrative oversight activities to ensure that reports include the required components. Implementation of these activities will result in all required meeting participants having input regarding eligibility determinations.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of planning meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of three-year timelines and preschool reevaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of speech evaluation reports to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Speech Reports—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech-language evaluation reports are not provided to parents prior to the eligibility conference.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents receive speech-language evaluation reports at least 10**

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days prior to the eligibility conference. The implementation of these activities will ensure that parents have the opportunity to review evaluation findings prior to the eligibility conference. As a result, they will be able to fully participate in making any eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings/participants, considerations/required components, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives and their alignment with the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines, and teacher access and responsibility for the IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of related services and initial evaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for revising IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Revisions—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently convene a meeting prior to making revisions to a student's IEP. In addition, the written notice provided to the parent does not include all the required elements.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a meeting is convened when the district proposes changes to a student's IEP and that written notice to the parent includes all the required elements. The implementation of these activities will ensure that all members of the IEP team are aware of any proposed changes to the IEP and that parents have the opportunity to disagree with these proposed changes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and implementation of IEPs by age three.

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

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of student and agency invitations, statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, student interests and preferences, procedures for conducting individual assessments, establishing partnerships with community resources, and monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by outside agencies.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification of courses of study.

Area(s) of Need:

Courses of Study—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that student IEPs do not identify specific courses as part of the transition plan.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students age 14 and older identify specific courses of study. The implementation of these activities will ensure that students will have the opportunity to achieve successful post-secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Lumberton Township School District on December 13 and 14, 2004. 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 its exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that, with minor revision, will bring about systemic change. The district is also commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. The district is further commended for the innovative and inclusive programs provided for students with special needs.

A review of data indicated that the district has made progress toward reducing the classification rate by revising the pre-referral intervention process. In addition, the district demonstrates a continued commitment to maintaining students with disabilities in their home school environment by expanding programs and implementing technological supports.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, nine parents attended and expressed satisfaction with the variety of programs and services offered by the district, including the preschool program. Participants did express concerns regarding provision of related services, extended school year, and level of communication between parents and staff. In addition, parents raised concerns regarding the special education reading program. Although not identified in the district's self-assessment, the district has established a committee that is in the process of reviewing and revising the district's reading program to address the needs of diverse learners.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Location, Referral, and Identification, Least Restrictive Environment, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, staff development, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, transfer procedures, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral procedures, evaluations, eligibility determination, IEP development, IEP documentation, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews, and preschool transition.

An area of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE is the provision of written notice for students eligible for speech-language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified additional areas of need regarding parent training, extended school year, reevaluation timelines, provision of related services, and initial evaluation timelines.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding notice of a meeting, provision of required procedural safeguards, functional

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assessments, components of speech reports and providing those reports to parents, courses of study, and procedures for revising IEPs.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Lumberton Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.