

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

District: Magnolia Public School District **County:** Camden

Monitoring Dates: February 23 & 24, 2005

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Caryl Carthew, and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Magnolia Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Magnolia Public 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 Magnolia Public School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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 the first step in the monitoring activities, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Magnolia Elementary School on the evening of February 1, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the on-site monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the OSEP team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's chief school administrator, principal, special education coordinator, child study team, general education and special education teachers, and related services providers.

District Strengths:

The Magnolia Public School District is commended for an informative and useful website located at www.magnoliaschools.org. The child study team page provides answers to frequently asked questions regarding the composition of the child study team and their individual responsibilities, an explanation of the referral process and evaluation procedures, as well as descriptions of related services, and the referral process for speech/language services.

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The district is also commended for the provision of an ongoing professional development series and teacher support program regarding differentiated instruction. Teachers are taught strategies for teaching to students' individual learning styles. As a result of this training, the number of students referred to the child study team has decreased this year in comparison to previous years.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Magnolia Public School District's classification rate for students eligible for special education and related services has been above the state average. The district reported this year that 92 of the 470 enrolled students (19.5%) in the district are receiving special education and related services compared to the state average of 14.61%.

The Magnolia Public School District data indicate that only 34% of all classified students are placed in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day as compared to the state average of 41.9%. The majority of classified students, 59%, are in general education classes between 40-80% of the school day. Though this is significantly higher than the state average of 29.6%, it should be noted that the district has identified concerns regarding general education access, continuum of options, and provision of programs and related services.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Procedural Safeguards, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the 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 compliance in the areas of policies and procedures, and parent and professional development.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of dissemination of IDEA information. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during 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 length of school day, transfer students, facilities and certification.

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During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of extended school year services, provision of related services, and maintenance of hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of programs in accordance with IEPs. During the school year, if resource classes exceed size limits, students are placed in self-contained classes. **The district did not submit a plan to address this area of need and must do so.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives for related services.

Areas of Need:

Related Services Goals and Objectives – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that therapy goals and objectives are not consistently developed for students requiring counseling and speech therapy.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure goals and objectives are developed and included in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for all related services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure related services providers have the necessary information regarding therapy needs and are able to determine progress in meeting therapy benchmarks.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings and participants.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for referral process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during 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 standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations for school-aged students, functional assessments for student potentially eligible for special education and related services, and written reports for student potentially eligible for special education and related services.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations for preschool students, required components for speech-language evaluation reports, and components of functional assessments for students potentially eligible for speech/language services.

Areas of Need:

Multi-Disciplinary Evaluations for Preschool Students – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that preschool evaluations do not consistently include assessments by at least two members of the child study team. The district was using the speech-language assessment as one of the two minimum required, when under current regulations, it must be considered an additional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a minimum of two child study team assessments are completed when evaluating preschool students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure sufficient information is available when determining eligibility for special education and related services.**

Speech-Language Evaluation Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech-language assessments do not contain an educational impact statement provided by the classroom teacher, thus failing to fulfill the multi-disciplinary component of the evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure speech-language evaluation reports include all required components for a multi-disciplinary assessment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. Implementation of these activities will ensure that reports include the information necessary to make appropriate eligibility determinations for students potentially eligible for speech-language services.**

Components of Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech-language assessments for students potentially eligible for speech-language services do not consistently contain all the required components of a functional assessment. Reports reviewed did not include structured observation, review of educational history, and review of interventions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure speech-language evaluation reports include all required components of functional assessment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations for students potentially eligible for speech-language services are based on assessment results obtained through a number of different sources.**

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of conducting reevaluations for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, timelines, reevaluation planning meeting, and participants.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation when the speech-language specialist determines that a student eligible for speech-language services may no longer require services.

Areas of Need:

Reevaluation for Students Eligible for Speech-Language Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that reevaluations are not conducted when a student classified as eligible for speech-language services may no longer require services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a reevaluation is conducted prior to a changing a student’s eligibility status. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and have the opportunity to request due process in the event they disagree with the decision made by the district.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of eligibility meeting, participants, statement of eligibility, and copy of evaluation reports to parents.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding criteria for specific learning disability. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of agreement/disagreement and rationale for eligibility determination.

Areas of Need:

Signature of Agreement or Disagreement - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the IEP team does not express assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for special education and related services or for students eligible for speech-language services. As a result, teachers are not afforded the opportunity to express a dissenting opinion and parents are not made aware of dissenting opinions.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a district personnel have an opportunity to state in writing whether they agree or disagree with eligibility determination. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are fully informed of any differing opinions regarding eligibility determinations.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, participants, required components, provision of IEP to parents, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and 90 day timelines.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding teachers being informed of their responsibilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during 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 considerations and documentations, and supplementary aids and services.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding decision-making, general education access, notification and participation of students in out of district placements in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of options. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Magnolia Public School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade and is not required to address issues of graduation.

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the areas of sufficient child study team personnel and case-management. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access to records, and maintenance and destruction of records.

No additional areas of need were identified.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Magnolia Public School District on February 23 & 24, 2005. 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 that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a public focus group meeting, four parents participated and expressed satisfaction with the district's programs and services. All of the parents reported satisfaction with their children's educational programs. In addition, the parents stated that they were satisfied with the level of communication with the district staff. Parents also reported that they attended IEP meetings and felt that they were considered valuable members of the IEP team.

For the past three years, the Magnolia Public School District's classification rate of students requiring special education and related services had been above the state average. The district's data indicate that the majority of classified students, 59%, are in general education classes between 40-80% of the school day. The district has written an improvement plan to conduct activities to further increase access to general education classes.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit by the Office of Special Education Programs included Procedural Safeguards, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent/professional development, length of school day, transfer students, facilities, certification, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by parents/staff, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations for school-aged students, functional assessments for students potentially eligible for special education and related services, written reports for students potentially eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation for change of classification for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation timelines, statement of eligibility, copy of reports to parents prior to meeting, required components of IEP, provision of IEP, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, least restrictive environment (LRE) considerations and documentations, supplementary aids and services, class size, age range, group size for speech, common planning time for teachers, home instruction, parent access to student records, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding dissemination of IDEA information, consideration of extended school year services, provision of programs and related services, maintenance of hearing aids, written procedures for referral process, criteria for specific learning disability, teacher have

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knowledge of/access to IEPs, least restrictive environment (LRE) decision making, general education access, notification and participation of students in out of district placements to nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of options, sufficient child study team personnel, and case-management.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding related services goals and objectives, multi-disciplinary evaluations for preschool students, components of speech/language evaluation reports, components of functional assessment, reevaluation of students eligible for speech-language services, and signature of agreement/disagreement of eligibility determination.

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