

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

District: Mahwah School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: January 7 and 12, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Mahwah School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Mahwah 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 **Mahwah 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 on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus meeting for parents and community members at the Mahwah Public Schools Board Office on October 5, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a modified desk audit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, scheduled of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including interviews with child study team members and administrators. Further interviews were conducted with parents by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan which will appropriately address all areas of need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for several social skills groups within the district. Circle of Friends is a program presented by the parents and run by the child study team. Students with special needs are teamed up with general education students for a variety of socially related activities. Another social skills group, organized by the child study team, helps students with disabilities in targeted areas of social skill building.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district is also commended for the Big Buddy Readers. Eighth grade students with disabilities share literature and related activities with a local kindergarten class on a monthly basis. Middle school and high school students with disabilities have access to a Homework and Study Skills Club after school everyday along with their general education peers. This program is staffed by a special education teacher who assists students in academic and organization areas. In addition, middle school nondisabled students and students with disabilities also have access to Lunch Life Line. During lunch students can receive assistance with academics in lieu of participating in recess.

Data Summary:

Based on a review of the data, the district is successfully educating 30% of preschool students with disabilities in an integrated preschool setting for the entire school day. Additionally, the district reported that 33% of students were educated with general education students more than 80% of the school day. Since this percentage is significantly below the state average, the district has developed a plan in Part I, Goal 1, Indicator 2 to address this area of need. Activities such as staff development in the areas of instructional adaptations and modifications and inclusion and least restrictive environment will be provided to staff members in addition to conducting a review of the placement of special education students currently educated with general education students less than 80% of the day by IEP teams.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Transition to Preschool and Statewide Assessments. Graduation Requirements 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.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 extended school year, provision of programs and the related services, frequency, duration and location of services, goals and objectives for the related services of

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

speech, physical therapy and occupational therapy, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of goals and objectives for the related service of counseling. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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, notices of meetings, written notice and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of the administrative code, parental rights in special education, written notice and notice of meeting in native language, written notice and meetings conducted in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals and identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedure for pre-referral interventions, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. 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: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, and components of written reports, bilingual evaluations and independent evaluations.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance and rejection of reports and functional assessments.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that evaluation reports from outside agencies are neither accepted nor rejected by the child study teams.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that child study team members accept or reject reports or parts of reports submitted by outside agencies. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any report or part of a report that was rejected by the child study team and the reason(s) why it was rejected. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that child study team members do not consistently conduct functional assessments.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all components of functional assessments are included in the evaluation process. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on a variety of assessment results. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VI: Re-evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the planning meetings and participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students last year in preschool.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding re-evaluation timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Re-evaluation Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interview that re-evaluations are conducted beyond the three timeline.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that re-evaluations are conducted every three years or sooner, if conditions warrant. Implementation of these activities will ensure an appropriately configured IEP team reviews existing data at least once every three years to determine the need for additional assessments and then to determine the student's eligibility status**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

based on that review. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the areas of copy of evaluation reports 10 days prior to eligibility meeting and eligibility criteria for specific learning disability. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards and vocational personnel at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process and general education access for school aged students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification and participation to students in out-of-district programs of nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding least restrictive environment documentation.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Least Restrictive Environment Documentation – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interview that all four questions regarding LRE are not addressed consistently and when they are addressed are not addressed accurately.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all four questions regarding LRE are accurately addressed in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that appropriate considerations are discussed and placement decisions are based on the needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section X: Transition to Adult Life

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests and surveys and assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 16 statement of transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of interim alternate educational setting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class sizes and waivers, age ranges and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and consultation time.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of pull-out resource programs exceeding code timelines of hours per day. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Mahwah School District on October 5, 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 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 will bring about systemic change. The district is further 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 commended for its creation of an integrated pre-school program which allows for general education access and placement for preschool students. However, the district educated over 33% of disabled students the general education for more than 80% of the day. Activities have been designed to increase the number of students with disabilities educated in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs, services and staff. Parents were especially pleased with preparation their children received related to transition to post-secondary educational setting. Many parents expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement in the IEP process and the receptiveness of the case managers and the Director of Special Services. However, some parents indicated frustration with a lack of preschool placement options and the lack of training of teachers and aides.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and services, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, goals and objectives for the related services of speech, physical and occupational therapy, length of school day and year, transfer procedures, facilities, certifications, surrogate parent policy, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, identification meetings, participants and timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, general education access in district for students 3-21, continuum of program, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool program by age 3, age 14 transition service needs, preference and interests, surveys and assessments, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessment, IEP requirements at age 14, out of district participation in graduation exercises, written notice of graduation, class sizes and waivers, age ranges and waivers, group sizes for speech

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, goals and objectives for counseling, code, PRISE, notices of meetings and written notice in native language, procedures for pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screening, eligibility criteria for specific learning disability, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, vocational personnel at IEP meetings, notification and participation of out of district students in extracurricular and nonacademic activities, age 16 needed transitions services, interim alternate educational settings, pull out replacement classes exceed code restrictions.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, re-evaluation timelines and least restrictive environment documentation.

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