

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

District: Mansfield Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: June 1 and 2, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kenneth Richards and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Mansfield 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 Mansfield 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 areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Mansfield Township 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 Mansfield Township Elementary School on the evening of May 10, 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, principals, special education director, child study team, general education and special education teachers, and related services providers.

District Strengths:

The Mansfield Township School District is commended for the Mansfield Academy of Professional Development. The Academy is funded by a grant from the Geraldine Doge Foundation. The district offers courses on various topics, such as, Teaching a Changing Student Population, Behavior Management, Differentiated Instruction and Managing the Disruptive Student. These workshops provided staff with a better understanding of inclusion and increased the number of in-class support classes and team teaching.

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The district is further commended for developing their Instrumental Music Program that offers additional music lessons to classified students so that they can participate in the school's music program with their non-disabled peers.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Mansfield Township School District's classification rate for students requiring special education and related services has been below the state average. In the 2004-2005 school year, Mansfield had 630 students of which 72 or 11.43% were classified as eligible for special education and related services compared to the state average of 14.61%.

The Mansfield Township School District data for 2005 indicate that 75% of classified students, ages 6-21, are placed in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day (the state average is 41.9%). However, all preschool students ages 3-5 and classified as eligible for special education and related services are in a special education early childhood setting with limited general education access. It should be noted that the district has identified concerns regarding decision-making for preschool students, continuum of options, and provision of programs as barriers to appropriate placement decisions for classified preschool students ages 3-5.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Program and Services, and Student Records 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 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.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of oversight of IEP implementation, consideration of extended school year services, and provision of related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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, content and provision of notice of a meeting, meetings, and content and provision of written notice.

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During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notices in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns regarding independent evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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 Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meeting timelines/participants.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary, 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: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, speech/language evaluations, and written reports.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, and copy of evaluation reports to parents.

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

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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.

- **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, provision of IEP to parents, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, and teachers having knowledge of and access to IEPs.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP components – Present Level of Educational Performance and goals and objectives. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 decision-making process for school aged students, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids/services, general education access, notification/participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, and continuum for school aged students.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding decision-making for preschool students, and continuum for preschool students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Mansfield Township School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to grade six and is not required to address issues of graduation.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment (FBA), behavioral intervention plans (BIP), interim alternative educational settings (IAES), and manifestation determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of notification of removal to case manager. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this activity.**

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Mansfield Township School District on June 1 & 2, 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, 17 parents and staff (including one board member) participated. Concerns were raised regarding least restrictive environment for preschool students, extended school year services, and need for parent support group. The district has written an improvement plan to address these issues. In addition, parents also expressed concerns regarding funding, or the lack thereof, and the direct impact on services to students. Some parents reported that although they attend IEP meetings they felt that the meetings were not "meaningful" and they were not considered valuable members of the IEP team.

A review of data indicated that the Mansfield Township School District's classification rate of students requiring special education and related services has been below the state average. The district has decreased the classification rate by providing successful staff development. In addition, 75% of the school aged classified students are in general education classes more than 80% of the school day. The district has identified an issue regarding general education access for preschool students ages 3-5 and has written an improvement plan to address this issue.

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 General Provision, Reevaluation, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Program 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 length of school day, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parent, consent, content/provision of notice of meeting, conducting meetings, content/provision of written notice, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by parents/staff, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines/participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, speech/language evaluations, written reports, eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, copy of reports to parents prior to meeting, IEP meetings/participants, provision of IEP, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90 day timelines, teachers having knowledge of and access to IEPs, least restrictive environment (LRE) decision making for school aged students, LRE considerations and documentations, supplementary aids and services, general education access, notification/participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, continuum for school aged students, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, interim alternative educational settings, and manifestation determination.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding oversight of IEPs, consideration of extended school year services, provision of related services, notices in native languages, independent evaluations, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, required IEP components, decision-making for preschool students, general education access for preschool students, continuum for preschool students, and discipline notification of removal to case manager.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding signature of agreement/disagreement of eligibility determination.

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