

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

District: Mansfield **Monitoring Dates:** October 30 & 31, 2000

Monitoring Team: Stephen A. Coplin, Debbie Masarsky

Background Information:

The parents and staff of the Mansfield School District were invited to attend a focus group public meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment included the collection of data and information from various sources within the district to determine if 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 review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment. Based on the information collected by the district, a self-assessment document was developed citing strengths and areas of need. The report of findings also contained 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 October 11, 2000 prior to the monitoring visit. This focus group, which included parents and district representatives, was facilitated by the New Jersey State Department of Education. At this meeting, some of the concerns discussed by parents were staffing, communication between special education and regular education teachers, class size, least restrictive environment and the referral process.

District Strengths:

The district provides a unique "peer modeling" program for its self-contained autistic class. Several students from fourth and sixth grade regular education classes interact with the autistic children to help them develop social skills through conversation, games, and story telling. The district's full time occupational therapist provides a number of in-service programs for parents, staff, and community members. She has been helpful in designing adaptive materials for students with multiple disabilities.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance:

Re-evaluation and Transition to Preschool 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:

The district board of education ensures that it provides publicly funded educational programs and services to students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state regulations. The district recently revised their policies to reflect changes since the adoption of N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The district has revised its special education procedures and has forwarded them to the county office for review and approval.

The district makes available to parents of students with disabilities and to the general public all documents relating to the eligibility of the district under Part B of the IDEA.

Interviews indicated that the district provides staff development opportunities throughout the year. In the self-assessment document, the district identified as an area of need, in-service training activities to address the conduct of students with disabilities.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Development- The self-assessment document indicated the need for training activities to further enhance teachers' understanding of proactive methods to address behavioral difficulties.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

The district provides free, appropriate special education and related services to students with disabilities age 3-21. These services are provided at public expense, under public supervision, and with no charge to the parent, by appropriately certified staff, and are located in facilities that are accessible to the disabled. The length of the school day and the academic year for students with disabilities is at least as long as that established for non-disabled students. Related services are provided to students with disabilities when required as specified in students' IEPs. Physical education is provided for students with disabilities, including those students in separate facilities. The district ensures that an extended school year is considered and discussed for all classified students.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for ongoing monitoring of programs and services, the implementation of an adaptive physical education program, the review of procedures for monitoring hearing aides and the development of written procedures for transfer students.

Area (s) of Need:

Monitoring of Programs and Services-The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to provide ongoing monitoring of their programs and services to ensure they are sufficient to meet the needs of students.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Adaptive Physical Education Program-The self-assessment document indicated that the district will review its need for the development of an adaptive physical education program.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Hearing Aides- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to review and update its procedures for monitoring hearing aides.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Transfer Students-The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to develop written procedures for transfer students.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

The district has policies and procedures to ensure that students with disabilities and their parents are afforded procedural safeguards. The district obtains consent prior to conducting any initial evaluation, implementing the initial IEP, conducting any reevaluation, and releasing student records. In addition, the district implements without undue delay, the action for which consent was granted.

Record reviews and interviews with parents and staff indicated that all timelines relating to initial evaluations, annual reviews, and reevaluations are being met according to code. Record review also indicated that notice of a meeting and prior written notice are provided within timelines and contains all components according to code. Additionally, all appropriate participants are in attendance at required meetings.

The district identified in its self-assessment document the need for the development of a procedure to document all attempts to secure parental participation at a meeting, an update to the child study team handbook to reflect code changes relative to parental consent, the purchase of a computer program enabling the provision of all written communication to parents in their native language, and the review and update of procedures for identifying and training surrogate parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Parental Participation- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to develop a written procedure to document all attempts to secure parental participation at a meeting.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Child Study Team Handbook- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to update the child study team handbook to reflect code changes relative to parental consent.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Native Language- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to purchase a computer program enabling the provision of all written communication to parents in their native language.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Surrogate Parents- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to review and update the procedures for identifying and training surrogate parents.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification:

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education has written procedures to locate, refer and evaluate students. Pre-referral interventions in general education programs as well as implementation of these interventions were documented in the files reviewed for purposes of this monitoring. Timelines for initial referrals were compliant. When an evaluation is warranted, the district does immediately secure parental consent for the evaluation as verified through parent and staff interviews and the evaluation plan form. In addition, within 15 days of conducting the evaluation plan meeting the school district provides parents with the written notice of the determination to evaluate. Procedures provide for referral by instructional, administrative and other professional staff of the district, parents and agencies concerned with the welfare of students.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for the revision of procedures in the staff handbook, the review and revision of the parent handbook, the revision of referral forms used by teachers and parents as well as the procedure to date stamp the receipt of the referral form and a revision of Child Find activities.

Area(s) of Need:

Procedures in the Staff Handbook- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to review and revise procedures in the staff handbook relative to referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee and the Child Study Team.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Procedures in the Parent Handbook- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to review and revise information provided to parents in the parent handbook regarding the Pupil Assistance Committee and the Child Study Team.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Referral Forms- The self-assessment document indicated that the district needs to review and revise referral forms used by teachers and parents and to date stamp the receipt of the referral form.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Child Find activities-The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for continuation of Child Find activities into the summer months.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that evaluation procedures are technically sound, are neither culturally nor racially discriminatory, and are administered by trained personnel. The district also ensures that students with disabilities receive a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who utilize a variety of assessment tools and strategies to assess the student in all areas of suspected disability. Written reports prepared by Child Study Team members included the use of standardized tests or measures. Evaluations are conducted in the native language of the student as appropriate. Functional assessment of academic performance, and where appropriate behavior, is completed by at least one evaluator. The results of the assessment are documented in the evaluation reports. When reports and assessments of members or specialists from other agencies are submitted to the IEP team for consideration, the IEP team accepts or rejects the entire report or any part of the report. Acceptance or rejection of the report is noted in writing and becomes part of the report of the district.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for further training of Child Study Team members with regard to the classification category of Specific Learning Disability, the purchase of assessment tools to evaluate Hispanic students in their native language, the revision of the eligibility conference report form, the revision of the current report form with regard to SLD students, and the revision of the report format for speech assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Training-The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for ongoing training opportunities for Child Study Team members to strengthen their understanding of the classification category of Specific Learning Disability.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Assessment Tools-The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to purchase assessment tools to evaluate Hispanic students in their native language,

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Eligibility Conference Report Form- The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to revise the eligibility conference report form to include a reference regarding relevant behavior and the relationship of that behavior to the student's academic functioning, and to identify the severe discrepancy between achievement and ability for students suspected of having a specific learning disability.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Speech Assessments- The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for a new report format for speech assessments, which consistently documents the required components of a functional assessment.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that a student is determined eligible and classified "eligible for special education programs and related services" when the student has one or more of the disabilities defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5 (c) 1 through 13, the disability adversely affects the student's educational performance, and the student is in need of special education programs and related services. The district also ensures that students are determined eligible and classified "eligible for speech-language services" when the student has a speech-language disorder that adversely affects classroom performance

and the student requires only speech-language services. Review of documentation and interviews with staff indicated that copies of Child Study Team and/or speech language evaluations are provided to parents.

The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for a formal referral form to be used by the speech therapist and sent to the Child Study Team. The district also identified in the self-assessment document a need to document the components of a functional assessment in the speech evaluation reports that is addressed in Section VI.

Area(s) of Need:

Referral Form- The district identified in the self-assessment document the need for a formal referral form to be used by the speech therapist when a student receiving speech services is thought to be in need of a Child Study Team evaluation.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that the appropriate team members conduct an IEP meeting to develop, review and if necessary, revise the IEP for those students determined eligible for special education and related services and for students determined eligible for speech-language services. IEPs are developed with the appropriate considerations, required statements and components. The IEP is implemented as soon as possible, reviewed at least annually, and a copy is provided to the parent.

Notices and meeting participants are areas that have been determined compliant in Section III.

The district identified in their self-assessment document the need to train special education teachers and case managers in the writing of the “Present Levels Of Educational Performance” and the documentation of any lack of expected progress towards the annual goals in the IEP.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Training- The district identified in the self-assessment document the need to train special education teachers and case managers to include more specific information in the “Present Levels Of Educational Performance” regarding the provision of related services and the documentation of any lack of expected progress towards the annual goals in the IEP.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment:

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures placement in the least restrictive environment by making available a continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, the district ensures that the placement of a student with a disability is determined at least annually, and that the placement is based on his/her IEP. The district also ensures that students, Pre-K-6 with disabilities, are educated to the extent appropriate, with their non-disabled peers. Notices regarding district activities are sent to those students who are currently educated in out-of-district placements.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to increase its emphasis on regular education as a first option for students with disabilities in Pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The self-assessment also identified the need to increase staffing to meet the demands of in-class-support programming.

During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of placement considerations for students with disabilities.

Area(s) of Need:

Placement Options- The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to increase its emphasis on the consideration of a regular education program as the first placement option for students in Pre-kindergarten through sixth grade.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Staffing- The district identified in the self-assessment its need to increase staffing to meet the demands of in-class-support programming.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Documentation of Considerations- During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding the documentation of the decision making process for placements of students with disabilities.

- The district will develop an improvement plan to ensure the appropriate documentation of the decision making process which includes what supplementary aides and services would enable the student to access and progress in the general education curriculum within the general education setting.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

The district board of education ensures that appropriate disciplinary measures are implemented for all students with disabilities when disciplinary action is required. The district has not excluded any student with a disability for more than 10 days. A procedure is in place for the Child Study Team to be advised when any student is suspended from school to ensure that the child is neither a classified student nor one who has been referred for evaluation. Written notification of students who are being suspended or placed in an "Alternate Educational Setting" is provided to the case manager. The consequences for the misbehavior of disabled students are no greater than those applied to non-disabled students.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document a need to develop a list of appropriate "Alternative Educational Settings."

Area of Need:

Alternative Educational Settings- The district has indicated in the self-assessment document a need for appropriate "Alternative Educational Settings" to be further defined for students who require such a placement due to disciplinary removals involving weapons, illegal drugs or controlled substances and for students who are a danger to themselves or others.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment:

Summary of Findings:

All students in the Mansfield School District participate in statewide assessment programs with appropriate modifications and accommodations, when necessary.

The district has identified in the self-assessment document a need to in-service staff regarding the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA).

Area(s) of Need:

Training- The district has indicated in the self-assessment document a need to develop an in-service workshop to train Child Study Team members on the content of the ESPA.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

Since Mansfield is a K-6 school district, there is no need to identify graduation requirements in IEPs.

Section XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

Interviews with the director, superintendent, parents and staff indicated that programs and services for disabled students are provided in accordance with code, specifically, class size, teacher certification, transportation, and home instruction. Child Study Team members are employees of the Mansfield Board of Education.

The district identified in the self-assessment document a need to revise written procedures regarding home instruction students and students in state facilities.

Area (s) of Need:

Procedures- The district identified in the self-assessment document a need to develop written procedures to address the area of students returning to in-district programs from home instruction placements and state facilities.

- The district has developed an improvement plan to develop written procedures for home instruction and the entry of students residing in state facilities.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

The district has met its responsibility to ensure that records are collected, maintained, secured in accordance with state and federal regulations. All records of students promoted to seventh grade are sent to the regional school district effective June 30th. A review of student records indicated that access sheets were included in each file and the central files documented the location of other records.

The district identified in the self-assessment document a need to revise its staff handbook.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Handbook-The district identified in the self-assessment document a need to revise its staff handbook to include a copy of the board of education policy on student records.

- The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Mansfield School District on October 30-31, 2000. 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. As a result of the thorough and comprehensive review conducted by the district during the self-assessment process, the district was able to self-identify a number of areas that require improvement. Furthermore, the district was able to develop an improvement plan that is sufficient to correct the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, parents expressed their concern with staffing, communication between special education and regular education teachers, class size, least restrictive environment and the referral process. During the on-site monitoring a peer-modeling program for its self-contained autistic class was identified as a unique and beneficial program for students in the district. Also identified as an area of strength was the training sessions provided by the occupational therapist for parents, staff and community members.

The on-site visit determined that the district provides a free and appropriate education for all students; adheres to all required timelines; has required participants in attendance at all meetings; has technically sound evaluation procedures; recruits and hires certified staff to provide programs and services; provides students with a variety of options to participate in regular and special education programs; develops IEPs that contain all required components and considerations; ensures that all students have the opportunity to participate in state wide assessment; provides transition services from early intervention to pre-school; and maintains and secures pupil records.

The self-assessment document identified areas of need within the standards pertaining to staff development, the need for written procedures and forms, assessment tools for Hispanic students in their native language, and the written evaluations prepared by speech therapists.

The onsite visit further identified the need to document the least restrictive environment decision-making process in IEPs when placing students with disabilities. The district is required to revise and submit its improvement plan within 45 days of receipt of this report.