

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

District: Mantua Township School District **County:** Gloucester
Monitoring Dates: January 25 and 27, 2005
Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Mantua School 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 Mantua Township 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 Mantua 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 on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the J. Mason Tomlin School on January 20, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

DATA SUMMARY:

The district's classification rate was 14.25 % which is commensurate with the state average for that year. From 2001 through 2003, the district exceeded the percent of students in the state, aged 6 through 21, who are educated in the general education classroom at least 80% of the school day. For preschoolers, however, the district is

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below the state average in placement in general education settings. The district identified concerns in the area of including preschoolers with disabilities in general education classes and developed an improvement plan to address this area of need.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Statewide Assessment and Preschool Transition 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day and year, facilities and certification.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding transfer students, related services and extended school year.

Areas of Need:

Transfer Students – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that a review of the IEP and evaluation information is not conducted and documented when a student classified as eligible for speech and language services transfers into the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district conducts an immediate review of evaluation information and IEP and documents the review in the student's records. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student receives the services consistent with the IEP or if necessary, a decision is made to conduct additional evaluations or to conduct an IEP meeting to revise the existing IEP. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Related Services – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that the district does not consistently identify and document the frequency, duration and location for related services including related services provided during the extended school year program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the IEP includes the frequency, location, and duration of related services. This will ensure that the student receives services as determined by the IEP team. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process indicated that extended school year

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services are not consistently considered for all students, including students classified as eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities and in-service to ensure that an extended school year is considered and discussed for all students with a disability. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of meeting, conducting meetings, and provision of written notice. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in the areas of notice of meetings and conducting meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of surrogate parent policy because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight activity to ensure the implementation of the procedure. The plan must be revised to include this component. The district's improvement plan must also be revised to reflect more timely correction of the provision of written notice, including the required components and timelines, and an activity to ensure that all team members and speech-language specialists receive training in the new procedures. Written notice must be dated to enable oversight of timelines.**

Additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meeting.

Area of Need:

Notice of Meeting – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that notice of meeting does not consistently sufficiently inform the parent of all the purposes of a meeting when multiple topics will be discussed to enable the parents to prepare.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure notice of meeting informs the parent of all purposes of the meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents have sufficient time to plan and prepare for the meeting. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice of meeting forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of direct referrals from staff and parents, health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process and identification meeting timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient and must be revised to reflect more timely correction and in-service training.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants.

Area of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that general education teachers do not consistently attend meetings, including those for preschool age students. This includes identification, eligibility and IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure general education teachers attend identification, eligibility and IEP meetings, as required, conducted for all school-age and preschool students with disabilities. Implementation of these activities will ensure staff who have knowledge of the student and programs will be in attendance and provide input regarding the decision making process. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary reports, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services. The district also accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports for students eligible for special education and related services and speech and language services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports and functional assessments conducted for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area of Need:

Written Reports and Functional Assessment – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that written reports prepared for

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students eligible for speech and language service do not consistently include all required components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities and in-service to ensure that all components of a functional assessment are conducted and reflected in written reports for students evaluated for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that sufficient information is obtained to determine eligibility and those parents have the opportunity to review evaluation results in writing. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of planning meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, participants and reevaluation completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of three-year timelines. **The district's improvement plan must be revised to reflect more timely correction of this area.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation planning meetings for students eligible for speech-language services.

Speech Reevaluations – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that reevaluation planning meetings are not consistently conducted when considering dismissal for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities and in-service to ensure that a reevaluation is conducted prior to ending services for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the appropriate information is considered when determining the eligibility status of speech students and that the appropriate people are involved in the decision. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, and provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meeting.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit eligibility meeting participants and signature of agreement or disagreement.

Areas of Need:

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through the record review process determined that general education teachers do not consistently attend meetings to determine eligibility. See Section IV.

Agreement and Disagreement with Eligibility Decision - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that the determination of eligibility does not consistently include a statement of agreement or disagreement with the eligibility determination by the child study team.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that team members certify in writing their agreement or disagreement and rationale for disagreement with the eligibility determination. Implementation of these activities will ensure that members of the team have an opportunity to state in writing whether they agree or disagree with the eligibility determination and to provide a rationale for disagreement. As a result, parents will be fully informed of differing opinions regarding eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and Present Level of Education Performance.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, teacher knowledge and required components and considerations. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants. See Section IV.

Area of Need:

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of school-age continuum, individual decision-making, supplemental aides and services and documentation of least restrictive environment.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making, general education access and continuum for preschoolers with disabilities. The district also identified concerns in the area of participation in extra-curricular and non-academic activities for students placed in out-of-district programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because the plans lack administrative oversight components to bring about corrective action. The plan must be revised to include this component and timelines must be amended to reflect more timely correction of the noncompliance.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

The Mantua Township School District serves students through grade 6. Transition to adult life is not applicable.

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedural safeguards, notification of removal to the case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational placement and manifestation determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of behavioral intervention plans. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in this area.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Mantua Township School District serves students through grade six. Graduation requirements are not applicable to this age group.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of program descriptions and class size. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about corrective action in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding consultation time.

Area of Need:

Consultation Time - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through the interview process determined that consultation time is not consistently provided for general education and resource teachers.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that consultation time is provided to general education and resource teachers. Implementation of these activities will ensure general education and special education teachers have the opportunity to meet to plan lessons and identify strategies and techniques that will afford students with disabilities the opportunity to participate successfully in general education curricula and programs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access, access sheets maintained in child study team records, documentation of location of other records and maintenance of records.

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 Mantua Township School District on January 25 and 27, 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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents indicated that students have current and individualized IEPs that reflect the needs of their children. Parents were of the opinion that the IEPs challenged the students and there was little repetition of goals and objectives from one year to the next. Parents stated that school age students with disabilities have access to all general education programs. Case managers, teachers and administration are responsive to the needs of the students and parents. Parental participation is encouraged and supported by the district. A concern regarding participation in extra-curricular and non-academic activities was identified by the parents. The district also identified concern in this area. Parents indicated that they would benefit from training in the areas of transition planning, IDEA and understanding the IEP.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included **General Provisions**, **Statewide Assessment** and **Preschool Transition**.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included certification, facilities, length of school day/year, consent, notices in native language, independent evaluations, interpreters at meetings, direct parent referrals, direct staff referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary reports, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bi-lingual evaluations and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluation by June 30th, eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, provision of evaluation reports to parents, Core Curriculum Content Standards, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, Present Level of Educational Performance, decision making regarding the least restrictive environment and continuum for students aged 6 through 21, discipline procedural safeguards, notification of removal to the case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational placement, manifestation determination, age range, group size for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets in child study records, maintenance of records and documentation of location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents, notice of meetings, meetings, provision of written notice, referral process, identification meeting timelines, three year timelines, annual review meeting participants, teacher knowledge of and responsibility for the IEP, required statements in

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the IEP, decision-making, general education access and continuum for preschoolers, participation in extra curricular and non-academic activities for students placed in out-of-district programs, behavior intervention plans, class size and program descriptions.

During the on-site visit, review of records and interviews indicated that the district has already brought about correction in the areas of initial IEP meeting participants, teacher knowledge of and responsibility for the IEP, IEP required considerations and components, behavior intervention plans, program descriptions and class size.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding transfer students, extended school year, related services, notice of meeting , written notice, identification meeting participants, written reports and components of functional assessments conducted for students referred for speech and language services, signature of agreement/disagreement, speech re-evaluation when ending services, eligibility meeting participants, annual review meeting participants, and consultation time.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Mantua Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.