

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

District: Maple Shade School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: December 17, 18, 19, 20, 2002

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Debbie Knauss, Arlene Popovici, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Maple Shade School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Maple Shade School District with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free and 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 positive student outcome.
- 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 Maple Shade School District developed an improvement plan to address the identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Steinhauer School on December 6, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the New NJDOE team reviewed district documentation, 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, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals general education and special education teachers and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district should be commended for the commitment of both time and resources in the training and implementation of the Fast Foreword Program, a highly individualized reading program that the district believed would be beneficial to eight of its students.

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The district's child study team members have committed their personal time to parents and students after school and on weekends by providing transportation to medical appointments, to counseling sessions, as well as to tutoring sessions.

Staff members have served on "Child Family Teams" through Family Service and DYFS. These staff members have also presented at CART team meetings in the County.

Team and staff members have volunteered for "Project Graduation" – an all-night celebration at Burlington County College where the graduating students have a drug-free/alcohol-free celebration of their accomplishments on graduation night.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation and Discipline was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies, procedures, and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional development. Although the district's improvement plan did not identify a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts, on-site monitoring indicated that the district has a successful mechanism in place. As such, the district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue

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

I. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and the provision of resource center services.

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Areas of Need:

Extended School Year- On-site record review and interviews with staff determined that the provision of extended school year services is not considered on an individual basis for all students at the middle and high school levels.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year services are considered and discussed for all students and that documentation of this discussion is included in the IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Resource Center Services - On-site interviews and record review indicated that although IEPs require resource center services five times per week, these students were only receiving services three times per week. They receive mainstreamed world languages the other two sessions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs are fully implemented in accordance with IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of surrogate parent, consent, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of meetings and written notice. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these new procedures. The plan must be revised to include this component.

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

IV. Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district-identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, identification meeting timelines and referrals from the regular education intervention team. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, training and an administrative

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oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding speech referrals.

Areas of Need:

Speech Referrals - During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated there is backlog of students who have been referred. A further review indicated the district has not yet conducted identification meetings for these students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meeting are conducted within 20 days of receipt of the referral. The plan must include a mechanism to determine whether the district has sufficient staff to provide mandated services. In the event additional staff are required, the plan must include the manner in which the district will provide these mandated services.**

V. Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and accept/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports.

Area of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that written reports are not consistently signed and dated.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure written reports are consistently signed and dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of meetings and written notice. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during on-site monitoring regarding participants.

Area of Need:

Participants - During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that regular education teachers do not consistently attend eligibility meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers attend eligibility meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives aligned with the CCCS, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge/responsibility of IEPs, and age of majority. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address age of majority. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher knowledge of IEPs because it lacks an administrative oversight component. In addition, the district's improvement plan is insufficient to address goals and objectives aligned with the CCCS because it lacks appropriate procedures. The district will revise their improvement plan to include these components.

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

Areas of Need:

Participants - During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that regular education teacher are not consistently in attendance at IEP

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meetings. It was further indicated that guidance counselors routinely take the place of the regular education teacher, even though they do not provide direct instructional services to these students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers attend IEP meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services and continuum. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise their improvement plan to include these components.

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

X. Transition – EIP to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and EIP to preschool disabled by age three.

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

X. Transition – Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of aligning goals and objectives to desired outcomes. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding student/agency invitations, agency involvement, statement of transition service needs, identification of liaison to post-secondary resources and an additional concern in the statement of needed transition service.

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Areas of Need:

Statement of Transition Service Needs – On-site review of student IEPs indicated student interests and preferences were not consistently documented in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure student interests and preferences are documented in IEPs. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Statement of Needed Transition Services/Liaison – During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs indicated that the category of related services is not included in the statement of needed transition services when considering individual student needs. It was further indicated IEPs do not identify the individual who will serve as the liaisons to post secondary resources.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the statement of needed transition services includes all required components. The plan must also include the identification of a liaison to post-secondary resources. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Student/Agency Invitation and involvement – During the on-site visit it was determined through interviews and record review that students and agencies involved in the transition process are not consistently invited to meetings when transition is discussed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students and agencies are invited to attend meetings where transition planning will occur. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

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

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XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant the areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Area of Need:

Notice of Graduation – During the on-site visit record review indicated that the district does not provide written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides notice of graduation to parents and adult students. The plan must include a mechanism to document that provision as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, group size and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of description the team teaching model and resource center programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address description for the team teaching model. The district's plan is insufficient to address issues related to resource center programs because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to revise the plan to include these components.

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

Area of Need:

Common Planning Time - During the on-site visit a review of records and interview with staff determined that special education and regular education teachers are not provided with common planning time.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure teachers have common planning time. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

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XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of access, destruction and documentation of locations of other records.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding parent/adult student access to records and maintenance. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Maple Shade School District on December 17, 18, 19, 20, 2001. 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. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review it conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to self-identify the majority of areas that require improvement as well as develop a comprehensive improvement plan that with some revision should result in systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Additionally, parents reported there has been an improvement in programs and services over the last year.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, facilities, independent evaluations, consent, standardized assessments, planning meetings, documentation of eligibility, implementation dates, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, discipline, and programs and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of related services, written notice, the referral process, identification meetings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, timelines, meeting participants, components of IEPs, least restrictive environment, participation in statewide assessments, and student records.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, participants, written reports, transition, behavior intervention plans and written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.