

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

District: Marlboro Township School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: October 18, 2004

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky and Barbara Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Marlboro 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 **Marlboro Township School District** with an opportunity to evaluate its 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 **Marlboro Township School District** developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a comprehensive desk audit, interviewed the director, supervisor, child study team members, speech therapists and parents and held a public focus group meeting for parents and community members at the administration building on October 14, 2004. The purpose of these activities was to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff from the Office of Special Education Programs that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan that will appropriately address the areas need identified by the district staff.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District Strengths:

The district is commended for developing a variety of unique programs offered to students with disabilities:

The district's ***Friendship Program*** includes general education middle school students who visit with students with autism in the elementary school once a month. The general education students provide social modeling through their interactions with the students with autism. The ***Horse Back Riding Program*** provides monthly horseback riding activities for their students with autism. This program has been made available to these students for the past two years through a grant from the Flutie Foundation. The district also provides a ***Guidance Program*** that includes special and general education students in each of the elementary schools. Guidance counselors work with students on such skills as decision making, tolerance, conflict management, independence and career exploration.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data indicates a drop from 2002 to 2003 in the number of students with disabilities who spend more than 80% of their school day in general education classes. In an effort to increase the number of students with disabilities who can be provided the opportunity to be educated in general education programs, the district continues to provide extensive in-service training regarding differentiated instruction and has instituted a team teaching model for a number of classes for the 2004-2005 school year. Furthermore, the district's long range plans indicate the adoption of a team teaching model for all classes in the district. The district anticipates that the improvement in the delivery of instruction will advance student performance as well.

The data further indicated that the percent (72.7%) of the district's preschool disabled students who are placed in self-contained classes is much higher than the statewide average of 50.3%. The district identified this as an area of need in the self-assessment. An improvement plan was developed that is sufficient to address this area through the expansion of the district's Preschool Learning Center program, which includes 3-year-old students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers, and the continuation of outreach activities that provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be placed in integrated preschool programs within the community.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment 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 desk audit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and /or parent interviews.

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 related services, goals and objectives for speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy services, transfer students, length of school day/year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives for counseling and hearing aid checks. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and /or parent interviews.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notices and surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and /or parent interviews.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of direct referrals and identification meetings with required participants convened within the 20-day timeline.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health/medical summary, vision/hearing screenings, and principal approval of child study team referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and /or parent interviews.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during monitoring regarding functional assessment and acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Components of Functional Assessment – During monitoring it was determined through record review, interviews with child study team members and the speech-language therapist, that interventions attempted by the classroom teacher are not consistently included as a required component of the functional assessment in evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluators include all required components of functional assessment in their reports. As a result of these activities, eligibility determinations will be based on all required data obtained through the assessment process. The revised improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Acceptance/Rejection of Outside Reports - During monitoring it was determined through interviews with the director and child study team members that although the district reviews and documents the acceptance of outside reports, documentation of the rationale for rejection of all or parts of reports is not included.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a rationale is documented when reports written by personnel not employed by the district are reviewed and accepted or rejected by child study team members. The acceptance or rejection of all or part(s) of a report, along with a written rationale for the rejection must be documented in the student file. As a result of these activities, relevant and necessary information is considered for each student and becomes part of the report(s) of the district. Additionally, parents will be fully informed of the rationale for any rejection that may impact eligibility determinations and will have the opportunity to exercise their due process rights. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations, provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the monitoring process, it was determined that the district has begun to implement the improvement plan to document the statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and parent interviews.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, the provision of IEPs to parents and annual review /90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of general education teachers at meetings to determine eligibility for speech and language services and sending IEPs to parents prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the monitoring regarding IEP beginning and ending dates, required statements, revisions to IEPs, and teacher responsibility to implement IEPs.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Beginning and Ending Dates – During monitoring it was determined through record review and child study team interviews that although the IEPs are reviewed annually, some IEPs included beginning and ending dates that reflected a period of more than one year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP team meets annually, or more often if necessary, to review and revise the IEP and determine appropriate programs and services, as specified with NJAC 6A:14-3.7(h), that do not extend beyond a twelve month period of time. Furthermore, dates in the IEP will accurately reflect implementation. As a result of these activities required meeting participants will have the opportunity to review student progress and the appropriateness of each student’s program in a timely manner. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

IEP Components – During monitoring, it was determined through record review that some IEP components are not being completed, some contain boilerplate statements that do not reflect individual decision making and some components contain information that is not relevant to the issue to be discussed. For example, in the section *Modification in Extracurricular/Nonacademic Activities*, IEPs contain the phrase “classes may be cancelled due to professional and/or school activities.” Additionally, interviews with parents and child study team members indicated that a number of IEP areas are not consistently discussed during the development of the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP team discusses each required IEP component and accurately addresses decisions in students’ IEPs. As a result of these activities IEPs will reflect the decisions made by the team necessary to develop a program that meets the individual needs of the student. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Revisions to IEPs - During monitoring, it was determined through interviews with the director and child study team members that changes have been made to students’ programs(s) and/or service(s) without convening an IEP team meeting. Although in some cases, the parent might have provided verbal consent, in these instances all required participants were not involved in the decision-making process prior to making changes in the student’s program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEP team meetings are conducted prior to changing a student’s program and/or services and written notice is provided to the parent. These activities will ensure that all required members of the IEP team are included in the decision-making process and that parents have the opportunity to consider the proposed changes and dispute the changes, if necessary. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Teacher Knowledge/Responsibility to Implement IEPs – During monitoring it was determined through interviews with parents, child study team members, the special education director, and the supervisor that although the district has a mechanism to ensure that teachers have access to IEPs, there is no procedure in place to ensure that general education teachers are informed of their educational responsibility to provide the supports and services required by the IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that general education teachers understand their educational responsibilities to provide the supports and services as documented in students' IEPs. As a result, students will have the opportunity to receive instruction in the general education setting with the supports and services they need in order to benefit from instruction. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in offering a continuum of programs for students ages 4 through 21 and access to non-academic and extracurricular activities within the district/continuum of programs for students 4-21.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual decision-making/integrated preschool opportunities for 3-year old students with disabilities, and notification to students placed out-of-district of nonacademic/extracurricular activities that occur within district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process regarding individual decision-making for middle school students who require in-class support programs, consideration of supplementary aids and services, documentation regarding decisions about the least restrictive environment (LRE), and regular education access with non-disabled peers for 3-year old preschool disabilities students in self-contained classes.

Area(s) of Need:

Individualized Decision-Making at the Middle School – During monitoring it was determined through interviews with parents, child study team members and the director that the district only provides in-class support services at the middle school two days per week. The director cited budget cuts and insufficient staff as the barriers to the provision of additional in-class support services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEP teams engage in individualized decision-making regarding in-class support programs at the middle school. The plan must include hiring staff in sufficient numbers to ensure the provision of the programs and services described in the IEPs. As a result of these activities the district will be able to increase the number of students who have the opportunity to benefit**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

from instruction in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in the general education setting. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Consideration of the LRE and Documentation – During monitoring, it was determined through interviews with parents, child study team members and the director that the district does not consistently consider variety of supplementary aids and services that may be provided to students that would enable them to be educated in a general education classroom. Although the district is using the IEP format recommended by the New Jersey Department of Education, some IEP teams are not implementing the LRE decision-making process as evidenced by irrelevant responses to LRE questions in IEPs. .

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEP teams make individualized decisions, based on consideration of supplementary aids and services. The IEP team must document in the IEP the specific supplementary aids and services and/or program modifications considered and rejected and the explanation as to why the supplementary aids and service and/or program modifications are not appropriate to meet the student’s needs in the general education class. As a result of these activities the district will be able to increase the number of students who have the opportunity to benefit from instruction that is based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards in the general education setting with their peers. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

General Education Access – During monitoring it was determined through interviews with parents, child study team members and the director that the district does not provide general education access to students in the 3 year-old self-contained preschool program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students in the 3 year-old self-contained preschool program are provided the opportunity to access general education with their non-disabled peers. As a result of these activities the district will be able to increase the number of students who have the opportunity to benefit from instruction in the general education setting with their non-disabled peers. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the monitoring process it was determined that the district does not consistently address post-secondary transition issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during monitoring regarding post-secondary transition issues.

Area(s) of Need:

Post-Secondary Transition Issues - During monitoring process it was determined through interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not consistently address transition issues for students age 14 or younger that include: discussing post-secondary transition at IEP meetings; provision of invitations to parent(s), student and agency; alignment of courses of study with assessed interests and preferences; and completion of the *Statement of Transition Service Needs*.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEP teams discuss post-secondary transition at IEP meetings for students age 14, or younger; provides parent(s), student and agency with invitations to IEP team meetings when post-secondary transition will be considered/discussed; align courses of study with assessed students' interests and preferences; and accurately complete the transition statement within IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student has the opportunity to participate in classes and other experiences that are related to the interests and preferences identified by the student and to achieve successful post-secondary outcomes. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During monitoring, it was determined that the district does not address graduation requirements in the IEPs of students who will be transitioning into high school.

Area(s) of Need:

Graduation Requirements – During monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not address graduation requirements during IEP team meetings for students who will be transitioning into high school while their current IEP is in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district obtains input from the receiving high school regarding graduation requirements when IEPs are developed for students**

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

transitioning from grade eight to high school and document these requirements in the IEP. As a result of these activities, parents and students will participate in decision making and be fully informed of the requirements the student must fulfill to receive a diploma. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of improving student achievement and description of special education programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, staff interviews, focus group meeting and /or parent interviews.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

Special education monitoring was conducted in the **Marlboro Township School District** on October 18, 2004. The purpose 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 areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs to be compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data indicates a drop in the number of classified students who spend the majority of the school day in general education classes. In an effort to increase the number of students with disabilities who can be provided the opportunity to be educated in regular education programs, the district continues to provide extensive in-service training regarding differentiated instruction and has instituted a team teaching model for a number of classes for this school year. Furthermore, the district's long range plans indicate the adoption of a team teaching model for all classes in the district. The district anticipates that differentiated instruction will improve student performance as well.

The data further indicated that the number of preschool students with disabilities who are placed in self-contained classes is much higher than the state average. The district identified this as an area of need in the self-assessment. An improvement plan was developed that is sufficient to address this area through the expansion of the district's Preschool Learning Center program to include three year-old students with their non-disabled peers and the continuation of outreach activities that provide opportunities for these students to be placed in integrated preschool programs within the community.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and communication with staff. Other parents were extremely pleased with the district's planned activities that provide opportunities for students with autism to interact with their non-disabled peers. Although the opinions expressed by parents were generally positive, some parents expressed concerns regarding staff responsibility in implementing students' IEPs, provision of in-class support services at the middle school, post-school transition issues and staff training. These areas were identified as areas of need through the self-assessment process or monitoring and, as a result, the improvement plan will address them.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the monitoring visit included policies and procedures; staff and parent training; dissemination of public information; extended school year; provision of programs and related services; goals/objectives for speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy; documentation of location of related services; transfer students; length of school day and year; facilities; certification; consent; provision of notices; notices in native language; interpreters; independent evaluations; direct referrals; identification meetings with required participants convened within the 20-day timeline; standardized assessments; multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education/related services; bilingual evaluations; written reports; reevaluation planning meetings with required participants within the 3-year timeline; reevaluations by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool; present levels of education performance statements; goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards;

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

provision of IEPs to parents; annual review and 90-day timelines; general education access and continuum of programs for students ages 4-21; preschool transition planning conferences; IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three; notification of suspension to the case manager; suspension tracking; manifestation determination meetings; functional behavioral assessments; behavior intervention plans; interim alternative educational settings, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students; statewide assessment participation; approved accommodations/modifications for statewide assessment; IEP statewide assessment documentation; alternate proficiency assessments; age range; class and group size; home instruction; consultation time for special and general education teachers; access/requests for student records, access sheets; and documentation of other locations of student records in the central file.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding goals and objectives for counseling; hearing aid checks; content of notices; surrogate parents; child find activities; referral process; pre-referral interventions; health and medical summary; vision and hearing screenings; principals' approval of child study team referrals; multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services; eligibility meeting participants; statement of eligibility for *Specific Learning Disability*; agreement/disagreement with eligibility; provision of evaluation reports to parents at least ten day prior to the eligibility conference; general education teachers at IEP meets for students eligible for speech and language services; IEPs to parents prior to implementation; individual decision-making and integrated preschool opportunities 3 year-old students with disabilities; notification to out-of-district students if non-academic and extracurricular activities within district; improvement in student achievement; and description of special education programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding required decisionmaking during IEP meetings, general education access and transition to adult life. The specific areas of need identified include: documentation of the frequency and duration of provision of in-class support services and related services; components of the functional assessment; acceptance/rejection of outside reports; IEP beginning and ending dates; IEP components; revisions to IEPs; teacher knowledge/responsibility to implement IEPs; individualized decision-making for middle school students; consideration and documentation of the least restrictive environment; general education access for 3-year preschool students; post-secondary transition issues; and graduation requirements.

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