

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

District: Maurice River Township School District **County:** Cumberland

Monitoring Dates: October 21, 22 & 23, 2002

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Maurice River 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 Maurice River 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 Maurice River Township Maurice River 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 Maurice River Township Elementary School on October 10, 2002. 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, including a representative sample of student records. 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.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the development of a technology program that provides parents with a wide range of information through the district web site and provides access to staff through e-mail.

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The district provides opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in a Sylvan Learning Center program that includes prescriptive testing and supplemental instruction.

The district encourages parental involvement and provides an assortment of opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's education and school related activities.

The district has opened a regular education preschool class to provide regular education access for preschool disabled children.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certification

During self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of Extended School Year, hearing aids, related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of hearing aids because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of related services because it lacks projected timelines. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of extended school year because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure. The plans need to be revised to include these elements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of transfer students. During the on site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Extended School Year and related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that IEPs lack extended school year program descriptions, goals, objectives and the duration of extended school year services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs contain a description of the program, appropriate goals and objectives and the duration of the extended school year program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Related Services- During on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that beginning and ending dates for the provision of related services are not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure beginning and ending dates are documented in the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, meetings, and native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of meetings and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of surrogate parents because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of independent evaluations because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plans need to be revised to include these elements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of notice of meetings.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice and notice of meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that written notice does not contain all required components. In addition, though notice is provided, the district does not consistently document that provision.

- **The district will revise their written notices to include all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must also include a mechanism to ensure the district documents the provision of notice as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of this procedure.**

Notice of Meeting - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that notice of a meeting identifies specific individuals as meeting participants. However, these individuals often do not attend.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of a meeting identifies only the role/position of individuals it actually plans on having at the meeting. The improvement**

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plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedure.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, referral process, direct referral, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings

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

Area(s) of Need:

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the full child study team is not in attendance at the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the full child study team is in attendance at identification meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure.**

Section 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, multidisciplinary evaluations and bilingual evaluations.

During the self assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of training and an administrative oversight component to the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments and written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessment – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that functional assessments do not include teacher interviews and observations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure functional assessments contain all required components. The plan**

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must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure.

Written Reports - During the on-site visit it was determined through record review that written reports submitted by the speech-language specialist are signed but not dated. As a result one cannot determine when the reports are developed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech reports are dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, documentation of eligibility, criteria, and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Copy of Reports to Parents – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that the district does not consistently provide parents with a copy of evaluation reports ten days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents are provided with a copy of evaluation reports 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of teacher access/knowledge, 90 day timelines, annual review timelines, and the provision of the IEP to parents.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, PLEP statements, and goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of PLEP statements and participants because it lacks an administrative oversight component and projected timelines for implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of goals and objectives because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of training and projected timelines for implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants and goals and objectives.

Area(s) of Need:

Participants - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that a regular education teacher is not consistently in attendance at meetings. In some cases, a regular education teacher who has no knowledge of the student may attend.

- **The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a regular education teacher who has knowledge of the student, if the student is or may be participating in regular education, participates in the IEP meeting. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure**

Goals and Objectives – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that IEPs are developed without goals and objectives. A number of IEPs indicated these goals and objectives would be developed at a later date.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure goals and objectives are developed at the IEP meeting to address all areas in which special education services will be provided. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum and individual decision-making. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency invitation and documentation of interests and preferences.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding statement of transition service needs.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Transition Service Needs - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that the statement of transition service needs does not document courses of study and goals and benchmarks that relate to the student's desired outcomes and interests and preferences.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the statement of needed transition services includes the information necessary to address the desired outcomes, interests and preferences of the student. The plan needs to include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation of IEP no later than age three and documentation of participation in the transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section 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 for speech, home instruction, programs and common planning time

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class descriptions and child study team issues. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of child study team issues and the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of program descriptions.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access upon request and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of amending student records. The district did not submit an improvement plan in this area. The district must develop an improvement plan that includes procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of location of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Location of Records - During on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that central files do not indicate the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Maurice River Township School District on October 21, 22 & 23, 2002. 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 many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. While parents indicated satisfaction with the provision of instructional areas identified in the IEP, concern was raised regarding the provision of related services and communication between the child study team members and parents. Parents also expressed concern with accessibility to the child study team members. Parents praised the teachers for maintaining high expectations for students as well as with the communication between teachers and parents. Additionally, parents indicated that the district makes every effort to involve them through advisory councils, fairs, lunches and back to school night. Parents also expressed a high degree of satisfaction with access to computers and technology.

Areas demonstrating compliance with all standards included General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation.

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, certification, consent, meetings, native language, child find activities, referral and direct referral process, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, standardized assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meetings, documentation of eligibility, criteria, signatures of agreement, disagreement rational, teacher access/knowledge, 90 day timelines, annual review timelines, provision of IEP to parents, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aids and services, extra curricular and nonacademic activities, agency representation, invitation to meetings, documentation of interests and preferences, class size, age range, group size for speech, home instruction, programs, common planning time, access to records and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding Extended School Year, hearing aids, related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, notice of meetings, independent evaluations, documenting acceptance/rejection of reports, eligibility meeting participants, IEP meeting participants, PLEP, goals and objectives, continuum, individual decision-making, implementation of IEP by age three, participation in transition planning conferences, class descriptions, child study team issues and amending student records

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding Extended School Year, related services, written notice, notice of meeting, identification meeting participants, functional assessments, written reports, copy of reports to parents, IEP meeting participants, required IEP components, transition service needs, and the documentation of location of records.

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