

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

District: Medford Lakes Borough School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: January 21, 22, 23, 24

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Debbie Knauss

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Medford Lakes School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Medford Lakes 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, area that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Medford Lakes School District developed an improvement plan to address the identified areas.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring visit to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan and 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 the Neeta School on January 17, 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 documentation, 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 administrator, building principals general education and special education teachers, building principals general education and special education teachers and child study team members.

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District Strengths:

The district provides the Fast Forward Program for students with weakness in phonemic awareness during a before-school tutorial program. This tutorial occurs at 7:00am every weekday. The district should be commended for its commitment of both time and resources to the training and implementation of this highly individualized program.

In addition the district provides a homework club called Project Infinity. Students have the opportunity to stay after school and receive help in the areas in which they are experiencing difficulty.

The district provides a Microsoft program called Word Smith that allows students to be more independent in completing their schoolwork.

The district has recently implemented an integrated preschool program, that parents report they are very pleased with.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance In All Standards:

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

Section I: General Provision

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding professional development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the professional development. The plan needs to be revised o include this component.

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

Section II: 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, transfer students, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, provision of related services, and monitoring the implementation of students IEPs regardless of placement. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address extended school year because it lacks procedures, in-services and an administrative

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oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district's improvement plan to address related services and monitoring IEPs is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notice of a meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address notice of a meeting because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 meeting participants for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area of Need:

Meeting Participants - During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that parents are not consistently in attendance at meetings and teams are not making additional attempts to ensure their participation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure multiple attempts are made to afford parents the opportunity to participate in meetings. The plan must include a mechanism to document these attempts in the student file. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section 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, and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find and the referral process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because the submitted procedures include incorrect timelines for the provision of

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this information to the team members. The plan needs to be revised to identify an appropriate procedure.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments and accept/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address acceptance and rejection of reports. During the on-site it was determined the district has already implemented activities that have corrected this area of need. The district's improvement plan to address standardized assessments and functional assessments is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 written reports.

Areas 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 their improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are consistently signed and dated. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, notices, parental consent and turning age 5.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding timelines for speech and language reevaluations.

Area of Need:

Timelines - During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that speech and language reevaluations are not consistently completed within the three-year timeline.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that revaluations are completed within three-year timelines. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, notices, participants and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. 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.

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notices, components and considerations, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district-identified concerns in the areas of participants, required statements and goals and objectives for counseling and in-class support. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of participants at IEP meetings and statement of special education and related services.

Areas of Need

Signature of Participants at IEPs – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that participants are using initials instead of full signatures.

- **The district will revise their improvement to include procedures to ensure each participant provides his or her signature to indicate participation at meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Program Description within the IEP - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that IEPs of students' classified preschool disabled did not accurately reflect the program agreed upon at the IEP meetings. Though the IEPs indicated these

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students were in a preschool disabled class, they in fact were in an integrated preschool setting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs accurately reflect the program and placement agreed to at the IEP meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access, considerations and documentation, individual decision-making, and supplementary aids and services.

During the self-assessment process the district-identified concerns in the areas of continuum and Oberti. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district has already implemented activities to address the Oberti issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

Area of Need:

Nonacademic and Extracurricular Participation – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that out-of-district students are not invited to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

- **The district will revise their improvement plan to include procedures to ensure out-of-district students have the opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities provided in the district. The plan needs to include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedure.**

X. Transition

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district-identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transitions service needs, student/agency involvement and IEP considerations and documentations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site it was determined the district has already implemented activities to address the area of student involvement in the transition process.

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

Section XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, manifestation determinations and IAES.

During the self-assessment process the district-identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case managers, behavior intervention plans and functional behavioral assessments. 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.

Section XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of alternative assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

No addition 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, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of common planning time, allotted time for case management responsibilities, supplemental instruction, description of programs and home instruction. 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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Section XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance, destruction, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area 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 Medford Lakes Public School District on January 21, 22, 23 and 24. 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 comprehensive identification of areas of need and the identification of improvement plan activities that, with some revisions, should be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and identified issues of concern regarding teacher knowledge of IEPs, involvement of students in out-of-district placements in district-run activities and communication between parents and teachers at the upper grade levels. The district had already identified many of the concerns that were raised by the parents during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified by the district as consistently compliant during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedure, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings written notice, native language, independent evaluations, summer referrals, identification meetings, bilingual evaluations, turning age 5, bilingual evaluations, timelines, eligibility, alignment of goals and objectives with CCCS, preschool transition, graduation and programs and services

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, extended school year, provision of related services, monitoring of the implementation of IEP regardless of placement, surrogate parents, child find, referral process, criteria, evaluation reports to parents, continuum, Oberti, age 14 transition services needs, discipline procedures, alternative assessments, common planning time and access to records.

The on-site visit further identified areas of need within the various standards regarding meeting participants, written reports, timelines, IEPs, and out-of-district participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

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.