

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

District: Mendham Borough School District **County:** Morris
Monitoring Dates: December 16 and 17, 2003
Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Mendham Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Mendham Borough 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 Mendham Borough 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 Hilltop School, on December 10, 2003. 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:

Mendham Borough has an extensive system of staff development, which includes in-house resources, professional consultants and collegial planning to assist their teachers in the acquisition of skills regarding the implementation of new and innovative strategies and programs. Special education teachers are included in these staff development

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

activities in all curricular areas and meet regularly with their regular education peers to share their knowledge and expertise regarding strategies to instruct disabled students.

The district has committed itself to a broad-based inclusive education initiative. This commitment is confirmed by the large percentage of students with disabilities being educated in general education settings. Interviews with staff throughout the district further reinforced the systemic commitment to, and acceptance of, inclusive practices.

The district is commended for its creation of a Special Services Web Page. This web page offers the parents and community information regarding special education programs, staff, links to agencies, eligibility and other special education programs.

In 2002, a team consisting of one special education teacher and five content area teachers at the Mountain View School received a \$10,000 Fellowship Grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for an interdisciplinary program for all curriculum content areas, including special education. This project was called "Canada: Our Neighbor to the North: A Shared Continent, A Shared Border, A Shared Heritage, A Shared Friendship."

Data Summary:

Over 90% of the district's special education students are educated in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, which is above the state average of 41.6%. A review of the district's classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 7.5% (without speech only students), which is below the state average of 13.9%. A review of self-assessment findings indicates the district identified issues in the area of the referral process that may be impacting the district's classification rate. Data indicate that in 2002, 25% of the preschool disabled population was educated in the special education setting and 75% were educated in a general education setting.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements and Programs & Services 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, length of school day, transfer students, testing facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of programs and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluation and meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings and written notices. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of Child Find.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participation, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of required statements, present levels of education performance (PLEP) statements, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, and annual review and ninety-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment (LRE) documentation, regular education access, notification/participation in out-of-district (OOD) nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consideration of supplemental aids and services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 area of preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition services needs, age sixteen needed transition services and agency invitation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-school transition planning conferences. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative education settings and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation to case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 and requests, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of access sheets. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Mendham Borough School District on December 16 and 17, 2003. 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 outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas and for developing an improvement plan that requires no revisions to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the implementation of activities that resulted in the correction of all areas identified by the district during the self-assessment process prior to the on-site visit. 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.

A review of district data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students age 6-21 in the regular education setting for more than 80% of the school day. A review of self-assessment findings indicates an area of need in the referral process which may be contributing to the district's low classification rate.

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 are satisfied with regular education access, they feel that more teacher training would enhance the educational experiences of their children. Several parents expressed concerns regarding transition to the middle school while other parents indicated they have students who have met with great success as a result of the creation of 4th – 5th grade transition activities. Parents expressed concerns with the high level of turnover within the child study team that they believe could result in inaccurate decisions regarding their children. Many of the concerns identified by the parents were identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services, length of day, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of notices, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, Child Find, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, 3-year timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement, disagreement rationale, participants, consideration/required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, least restrictive environment (LRE) documentation, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum of programs, transition, preferences and interests, early intervention to pre-school by age three, student invite, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out-of-district participation, written notice of graduation, diploma, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, case management time,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

access and request of student records, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, provision of programs and related services, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notices, referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, acceptance and rejection of reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents, required statements, present levels of educational performance (PLEP) statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, age fourteen transition services needs, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, discipline, documentation to case manager, consultation time, student records and access sheets.

The on-site visit identified no additional areas of need.