

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

District: Metuchen School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: September 30, October 1 and 2 , 2002

Monitoring Team: Debbie Masarsky, Stephen Coplin, Barbara Tucker, Michelle Davis

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Metuchen School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Metuchen 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 Metuchen 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 Metuchen High School on September 23, 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, speech therapists, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides a **Student Outreach Program** for special education and regular education students at Metuchen High School. The focus of this program is to encourage students to socialize more appropriately with their peers.

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At the primary level, the district operates a **Circle of Friends Program** for special education and regular education students that supports social activities and encourages positive relationships among peers.

Area(s) Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions 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 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, goals and objectives for related services, documentation of frequency/duration/location for related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of hearing aids, provision of program(s) and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, content of notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of notice of a meeting, provision of written notice within timelines and attempts to ensure/secure parental participation at meetings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks appropriate procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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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 and pre-referral interventions.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of health summaries and hearing/vision screenings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern in the areas of convening identification meetings within timelines and required participants at preschool planning meetings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 multi-disciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for students eligible for special education/related services (ESERS), standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of acceptance/rejection of all or parts of reports and signed/dated reports. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services (ESLS).

Area(s) of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluation/Functional Assessment for ESLS - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the speech therapist does not obtain a written educational impact statement from the student's teacher and only conducts a structured observation as the functional assessment.

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- The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the speech therapist obtains a written educational impact statement from the student's teacher and conducts a functional assessment the includes all required components in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d).

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting/participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 area of eligibility meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of eligibility criteria for specific learning disability (SLD). The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified a concern regarding the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parent(s)/adult students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks appropriate procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding statement of eligibility for SLD and agreement/disagreement for eligibility.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility for SLD - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the district includes the specific discrepancy within the eligibility statement for SLD, it does not indicate that the specific learning disability is not a result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, general cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to amend its eligibility statement to include the specific learning disability is not a result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, general cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.**

Agreement/Disagreement of Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not document agreement or disagreement from any participant(s) regarding eligibility statements.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents agreement/disagreement regarding eligibility determinations. The district's plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the 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 IEP considerations/required statements for students eligible for special education/related services, annual goals/objectives related to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates and annual reviews for ESLs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEPs in effect at the beginning of school year, shared-time vocational personnel participating at IEP meetings, opportunities for parent(s)/student to observe proposed placement(s), IEP teacher access/responsibility, IEP required statements for students eligible for speech/language services, input from secondary staff when developing IEPs of students transitioning into secondary school and documentation of progress toward annual goals at annual review meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of 90-day timelines and provision of IEPs to parent(s)/adult students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks appropriate procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the age of majority and annual review timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Age of Majority - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently discuss the transfer of rights at the age of majority during IEP meetings for students who will turn age 15 during the time that specific IEP is in place.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district discusses the transfer of rights at the age of majority during IEP meetings for students who will turn age 15 during the**

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time that IEP is in place. The improvement plan must also include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.

Annual Review Timelines for ESERS - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently complete annual reviews within the required timeline.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure annual reviews are completed within the required timeline. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the 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 the individualized decision-making process, regular education access and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities within the district and student placement in accordance with the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks appropriate procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 provision of transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of student's interests/preferences when the student does not attend the IEP transition meeting, student/agency invitation, courses of study and expected dates of implementation of needed transition services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of agency failure to provide services and planning of transition services when an agency providing or paying for services does not attend the IEP meeting. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks appropriate procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of IEP implementation by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of preschool transition planning conferences. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area.

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 and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, written notification to the case manager, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings and the determination of services for students whose short-term removals do not constitute a change in placement. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment (SWA)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff knowledge of the content of statewide assessments and the special review assessment (SRA). The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of out-of-district notification/participation in graduation exercises/activities, written notice of graduation and choice of diploma for out-of-district students.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the inclusion of a description of alternate requirement(s).

Area(s) of Need:

Identification of Alternate Requirement(s) – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that although the district uses the IEP to document graduation requirements and exemption(s), it does not identify the alternative requirement(s).

- The district will revise the improvement plan to amend the IEP format to ensure it identifies the alternate requirement(s) for graduation when a student is exempted from meeting standard graduation requirements.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of description of special class programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified a concern in the area of sufficient staff to provide required programs/services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this element.

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 to student records and staff knowledge of student record policies/procedures.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of informing parent(s)/adult student of their right to place a statement in the student's record. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Location of Other Student Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not document the locations of other student records maintained by the district in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the locations of other student records in the central file. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Metuchen School District on September 30, October 1 and 2, 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 many areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revisions should 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, approximately 20 parents, the superintendent, one board member, the director of student services and several staff members attended. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services especially the in-class support options throughout the district. Parents articulated that the district is very accommodating to their needs when meetings are scheduled and they consistently receive invitations to attend meetings. Parents are pleased with the district's Child Find activities, transition to pre-school by age three and transition to post-secondary services. Several parents stated that the district has not extended to students in out-of-district placements the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. There were concerns by some parents about the need for more parental involvement to ensure their children receive the proper programs/services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included parent/staff development, policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, extended school year, goals/objectives for related services, documentation of frequency/duration/location for related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, content of notices, notices in native language, interpreters, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, multidisciplinary evaluations/ functional assessments for ESERS, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings/participants, reevaluation by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility meeting/participants, IEP consideration/required states for students eligible for special education/related services, annual goals/objectives related to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines for ESLs, individualized decision-making process, regular education access, continuum, provision of post secondary transition services, IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessments, accommodations/modifications in statewide assessments, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, IEP requirements, OOD notification/participation in graduation exercises/activities, written notice of graduation, choice of diploma for OOD students, age range, class/group size, access to student records and staff knowledge of student records policies/procedures.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding hearing aids, provision of programs/related as per IEPs, provision of notice of a meeting/written notice, attempts to ensure/secure parental participation at meetings, health summaries, hearing/vision screenings, identification meeting within timelines, required participants at preschool planning meetings, acceptance/rejection of reports,

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signed/dated evaluation reports, reevaluation within three years or sooner if warranted, eligibility meeting participants, eligibility criteria for SLD, copies of evaluation reports to parent(s)/adult students, IEPs in effect at the beginning of the school year, shared-time vocational personnel participating at IEP meetings, opportunities for parent(s)/student to observe proposed placement(s), IEP teacher access/responsibility, IEP required statements for students eligible for speech/language services, input from secondary staff when developing IEPs of students transitioning into secondary school, documentation of progress toward annual goals at annual review meetings, 90-day timelines, provision of IEPs to parent(s)/adult students, participation of OOD student in nonacademic/extracurricular activities within district, student placement as per IEP, consideration of student's interests/preferences when the student does not attend the IEP transition meeting, student/agency invitation, courses of study, expected dates of implementation of needed transition services, agency failure to provide services, planning of transition services when an agency providing or paying for services does not attend the IEP meeting, preschool transition planning conferences, procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, written notification to the case manager, determining services for students whose short-term removals do not constitute a change in placement, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, staff knowledge of content of SWA, SRA, description of special class programs, sufficient staff to provide required programs/services and informing parent(s)/adult student of their right to place a statement in the student's record.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding multidisciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for ESLS, statement of eligibility for SLD, agreement/disagreement of eligibility, age of majority, annual review timelines for ESERS, graduation requirements and documentation of location of other student records.

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