

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

District: Middle Township School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: May 19, 2003

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin, Michael Lee, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Middle 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 Middle 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 Middle 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 Middle Township Administrative Building on May 13, 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, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district participates in the Middle Township Foundation for Culture and Education, which allows district staff to apply for cultural and staff development grants. The district also provides a multitude of professional development opportunities for staff offered within the district and outside of the district.

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The district also provides Project TEAM in which teachers help at-risk students. This program seeks grants for funding and is open to all students. The district is also involved in Panther Parent University, which provides assistance to parents in a variety of different areas.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures, staff and parent development, and dissemination of IDEA information. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 and year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines to bring about the required changes.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and adaptive physical education. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures and appropriate timelines. The plan needs to be revised to address these areas.** The district also identified concerns in the area of provision and documentation of related services and hearing aides. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of hearing aides.

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 area of independent evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, and native language. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The district further identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice.

Area of Need:

Written Notice - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and an interview with the director that although the district has appropriate written notice forms, it could not be verified that notice was provided to parents in the event they did not attend the IEP meeting. Since parents did not attend the focus group meeting and parent contacts during the on-site were unsuccessful, this determination had to be based on the file review which indicated a lack of documentation to support the provision of notice when parents did not attend the IEP meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided and documented in the student file if the parents do not attend the meeting. The plan must include appropriate timelines and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 for parents and staff and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines and participants. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The district further identified child find as an area of need. The plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented appropriate activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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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 assessments, standardized assessments, and bilingual assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines.** The district further identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about change in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments.

Area of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that all components of a functional assessment are not consistently completed, primarily the parent interview and an observation of the student in other than a testing session.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all components of a functional assessment are completed by child study team members and speech therapists. The plan must include appropriate timelines and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of participants at the planning meeting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines, notices of meetings, and parental consent. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of planning meetings and reevaluation meetings for students turning age five. The plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria, documentation of eligibility, and copies of evaluation reports to parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures and appropriate timelines.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants. **The district did not submit activities to address these areas and must do so.**

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 goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, and parental observation of proposed programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The district further identified implementation dates and teacher knowledge and access as areas of need. The plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implanted activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of non-academic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti, considerations and documentation, and continuum. **The district did not identify the barriers in their improvement plan. As such, the improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas. The plan needs to be revised to include activities that will remove the barriers to providing services in the least restrictive environment.** The district further identified regular education access and supplemental aids and services as areas of need. The district's

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plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 16 needed transition services, primarily in the identification of a post-secondary liaison. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area and must be revised to include procedures, training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines.** The district further identified student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, and participants at transition planning meeting as areas of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented 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 the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, and protections afforded to potentially disabled students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines. 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 XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Special Review Assessment. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.** The district further identified approved accommodations and modifications and IEP documentation as areas of need. The plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of diploma and participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP requirements. The district's plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 age range and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of home instruction, schedules and common planning time, child study team personnel, and resource and in-class support programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, an administrative oversight component and appropriate timelines. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.** The district further identified concerns in the areas of class size and special class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent and adult student access to records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Middle Township School District on May 19, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is also commended for implementing activities to bring about correction in many of the areas identified during the self-assessment process. The district is further commended for the 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, administrators, teachers, and a parent advocate expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. They were very pleased with the level of services and commitment from the district. Concerns were raised regarding extended school year, home instruction, and lack of funding for instructional assistants.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of day and year, facilities, certifications, independent evaluations, direct referrals, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, participants at planning meeting, age of majority, goals and objectives related to Core Curriculum Content Standards, non-academic and extracurricular participation, participation in statewide assessment, alternate assessment, participation in graduation, choice of diploma, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional and parent development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services, transfer students, oversight of IEP implementation, hearing aides, adaptive physical education, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language, child find age 3-21, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants and timelines, pre-referral interventions, written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, notices, parental consent for reevaluations, reevaluations for students turning age five, eligibility meetings, eligibility participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, parental observation of proposed programs, individualized decision-making, Oberti, LRE considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, continuum, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three, student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preference and interests, age 16 needed transition services, participants at transition planning meeting, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, protections

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afforded to potentially disabled students, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessment, IEP documentation, Special Review Assessment, IEP graduation requirements, written notice for eighth grade students, class size, home instruction, schedules, common planning time, child study team personnel, resource and in-class support programs, special class descriptions, and parent and adult student access to records.

The on-site visit identified two additional areas of need within the various standards regarding written notice and functional assessments.

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