

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

**District:** Middlesex Borough School District

**County:** Middlesex

**Monitoring Dates:** April 9 & 10, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Georgianna Parlacoski, Debbie Masarsky, Stephen Coplin

### **Background Information:**

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Middlesex 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 Middlesex 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 Middlesex Borough School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine 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 on March 27, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, vice principals, co-principal, guidance counselors, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

In the middle school, special education students have the opportunity to participate in a social skills program with non-disabled peers for approximately 12 weeks. The purpose of this program is to improve social functioning through role-playing, community interaction and discussions concerning the difference between formal and informal conversation.

# New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

## I. General Provisions

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Policy and Procedures and public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding parent training for special education issues.

### **Area of Need:**

**Parent Training** - During the on-site visit it was determined through staff interviews and the public meeting that parents are not provided with training on issues related to special education as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2 (B)13i(5).

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents receive training on issues related to their children and special education. .**

## 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, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of related services, goals and objectives for related services and transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

### **Area of Need:**

**Extended School Year-** During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through interviews that although extended school year is discussed for the most disabled students it is not discussed/considered for all students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is discussed and considered for all students and documented in the IEP. The improvement plan must include**

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

**in-service and 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 for initial evaluations and implementation of the initial IEP, provision of notice of a meeting, provision of PRISE to parents and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents, securing parental participation at meetings and the provision and components of written notice. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding 15-day timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding content of notice of a meeting, notices in native language and meeting participants. The district has adopted the state developed notice forms and started using them three months before the on-site visit.

**Areas of Need:**

**Notices in Native Language** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined that for parents who speak a language other than English, the district does not provide notices in the parent's native language, when feasible.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notices are translated and provided in the native language of the parent, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Meeting Participants** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through interviews and record review that regular education teachers do not consistently attend meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all required participants attend meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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

### **Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding child find activities, the referral process, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timelines, health summary and vision/hearing screening. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding speech screenings/identification meetings.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Speech Screenings/Identification Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews that when a student is referred by the classroom teacher or the parent for a speech problem, the speech therapist conducts a speech screening and unilaterally decides, based on the results of the screening, whether to convene an identification meeting to determine the need for an evaluation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts identification meetings for students referred for speech/language services to determine the need for an evaluation. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section V: Evaluation**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluation for students eligible for special education and related services and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding components of written reports, nature and scope of an evaluation and multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and in-service training to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified concerns regarding functional assessments and accept/rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

### Section VI: Reevaluation

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting reevaluation meetings for change in placement or eligibility and reevaluations completed by age 5.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding reevaluation timelines and attempts to gain consent. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

### Section VII: Eligibility

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding severe a discrepancy formula/criteria and the statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disability.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Severe Discrepancy Formula** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district has not adopted a severe discrepancy formula.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district adopts an appropriate severe discrepancy formula. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Statement of Eligibility for SLD** -. During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district does not include the required components in the eligibility statement for "Specific Learning Disability."

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district includes all required components in the eligibility statement for SLD. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

### **Section VIII: IEP**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding 90-day/annual review timelines, IEP/components/required statements and provision of copies of IEPs to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of current IEPs, implementation of IEPs, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, teacher access/responsibility, implementation dates and parent observation of proposed placement(s). The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the location of speech.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Location of Speech Services** – During the on-site, a review of IEPs indicated the district does not document the location of speech services in the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it identifies the location of speech services in the IEP. The plan must include an administrative component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

### **Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the individualized decision-making process, least restrictive environment, considerations/documentation of LRE and regular education access with supplementary aids and services. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding in-class support programs.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**In-Class Support Programs** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through interviews and record review that although in-class support programs are needed at all grade levels in the high school, it is only available at the elementary and middle school levels, and for freshman classes in limited subject areas at the high school level.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a full continuum of program options is available to students at all levels, as needed. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, complaint implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section X: Transition to Post-School**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student/agency invitations, statement of transition service needs and a statement of needed transition services. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

### **Section X: Transition to Pre-School**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition planning conferences and early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3.

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

### **Section XI: Discipline**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notification to case managers, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, short term removals, manifestation determinations, and procedural safeguards. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

### Section XII: Statewide Assessment

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of statewide assessment participation, accommodations and modifications and alternate proficiency assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the Special Review Assessment and documentation of statewide assessment in the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified concerns regarding IEP documentation of statewide assessment. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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

### Section XIII: Graduation

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of choice of diploma.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding graduation requirements. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and in-service training to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding notification to out-of district students of graduation exercises/activities within district and notice of graduation.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Notification to Out-Of District Students** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district does not notify out-of-district students of in-district graduation exercises/activities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that out-of-district students are informed of in-district graduation exercises/activities. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Notice of Graduation** -.During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents/adult students.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents/adult students are provided with notice of graduation and that this provision is documented in the file. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the “Notice of Graduation” form developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

### **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of group size for speech/language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding early childhood programs and a description of special education programs. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

### **Section XV: Student Records**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding access sheets and maintenance, location and destruction of records. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

# New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Middlesex Borough School District on April 8, 9 and 10, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held on March 27, 2002, fourteen parents expressed their views about many of the district's programs and services. Parents were pleased with the districts autistic program, special education teachers and preschool transition. They raised concerns regarding communication with case managers, the IEP team decision-making process, placement options, implementation of the IEP and the lack of the provision of related services. These areas of concern were identified by the district during self-assessment and an improvement plan has been developed to address them.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Policy and Procedures, public information, length of school day, facilities, certification, consent for evaluation and implementation of the IEP, provision of notice of a meeting, provision of PRISE, independent evaluations, standardized assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, conducting reevaluations for change in eligibility or placement, reevaluations by age 5, preschool transition planning conference, Early Intervention Program to preschool disabled by age 3, interim alternative educational setting, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, alternate proficiency assessment, choice of diploma and group size for students eligible for speech/language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, provision of related services, goals and objectives for related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, securing parental participation at meetings, provision and components of written notice, 15-day timeline, child find activities, referral process, prereferral interventions, 20-day timeline, health summary, vision/hearing screening, written reports, nature and scope of an evaluation, multi-disciplinary team for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments, accept/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, consent for reevaluation, copy of evaluation reports and IEP to parents, 90-day/annual review timeline, IEP components/required statements, current IEPs, implementation of IEPs, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, teacher access/responsibility, implementation dates, parent observation of proposed placement, individualized decision-making process, placement in the least restrictive environment, documentation and considerations of the least restrictive environment, regular education access with supplemental aids/services, invitation to transition meetings for students and agencies, statement of transition services needs, statement of needed transition services, written notification to case managers, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plan, short term removals, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards, special review assessment, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, graduation requirements in

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

the IEP, early childhood programs, description of special education classes, access sheets, maintenance, location and destruction of records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding location of speech, documentation of the statement of eligibility for SLD, parent training, extended school year, notices in native language, meeting participants, speech screenings/identification meetings, severe discrepancy formula, in-class support programs, notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercises/activities, and notice of graduation.

Within forty-five 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. In areas requiring the development of procedures, the improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation. In addition, any improvement plan activity that requires staff development must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service.

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