

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

District: Midland Park School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: April 6 and 7, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear, Gladys Miller and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Midland Park Public Schools** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcome. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Midland Park Public Schools** with an opportunity to evaluate 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 **Midland Park Public Schools** 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 meeting for parents and community members at the Midland Park High School on February 16, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Additionally, the OSEP completed a modified desk audit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as, reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel and other relevant information. Interviews with child study team members and administrators were also conducted. Additional interviews were conducted with parents by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan which will appropriately address all areas of need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for hosting a community preschool program within the district that operates collaboratively with the preschool program for students with disabilities. The presence of the community program allows opportunities for preschool students with disabilities to be educated with peers in typical preschool classrooms. The preschool

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program for students with disabilities offers an extended day for all students which expand the opportunity for peer interaction.

The district is commended for the collaborative partnership with the Bergen County Special Services (BCCS), Hearing Impaired Program (HIP) and Secondary Hearing Impaired Program (SHIP). Midland Park Public School, hosts the Bergen County Special Services HIP classes which ranges from preschool to grade 12 and offers programs for students in both self-contained and included settings. Teachers of the deaf from BCCS collaborate with general education teachers from Midland Park to provide program options such as in-class support, replacement and team teaching. The district has partnered with HIP in providing many of the supplemental aids and services such as sound-field systems in common areas of the schools.

Data Summary:

A review of the district data indicates that the district is educating over 57% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, which is significantly higher than the state average of 41.6%. Additionally, another 20.2% of students with disabilities are educated with general education students for 40 to 60% of the school day. It should be noted that according to district data from the Annual Data Report, 17.9% of preschool disabled students are placed in separate public school settings. These preschool students are reported as attending a separate public school when in fact, these students are attending a HIP program in their neighborhood school and are included, when appropriate, with their nondisabled peers as a result of the collaboration between the community preschool, the preschool disabled program and the kindergarten class. The data reporting issue will be explored with the Office of Special Education Programs.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions, Re-evaluation and Graduation Requirements were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the OSEP during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extend school year, provision of programs and related services, goals and objectives, frequency, duration and location of services, length of school day and year, transfer student procedures and certifications.

During district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and provision of independent evaluations.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of, notices of meetings to students where transition is being discussed and consideration of independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of notices of meetings to students where transition is being discussed and consideration of independent evaluations.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals and identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and date-stamping new referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and date-stamping new referrals.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VI: Evaluation:

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations and acceptance of reports.

During self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of providing a rationale for rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of rejection of reports with rationale.

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An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding speech and language reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Multi-Disciplinary Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that speech language reports do not contain input from the classroom teacher.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the speech language reports include information from the classroom teacher documenting the educational impact created by the speech problem. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the impact of the speech problem on participation in the general education curriculum is considered in eligibility decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of providing copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of copying of evaluation reports 10 days prior to eligibility meeting.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, (IEPs) to the parents and teachers access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of vocational school participants, present levels of educational performance, strengths and parental concerns in IEP for students eligible for speech and language services and 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of vocational school participants,

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present levels of educational performance, strengths and parental concerns in IEP for students eligible for speech and language services and 90 day timelines.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, general education access and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification and participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities and consideration of supplemental aids and services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of notification and participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding documentation of least restrictive environment.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Least Restrictive Environment Decisions – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that decisions regarding developing a program in the least restrictive environment are not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the documentation of the comparison of benefits in general and special education settings and beneficial and harmful effects of a placement on both general education students and the student with disabilities. Implementation of these activities will document the decision making process and more clearly define the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section X: Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age 14, transition service needs, preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consent to conduct interest inventories. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that

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the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of consent to conduct interest inventories.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-school transition conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of preschool transition conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination and interim alternate educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of discipline procedures regarding documentation to case managers of suspensions and implementing procedural safeguards when required. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas and during the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessments

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of Alternate Proficiency Assessment and knowledge of other statewide assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class sizes and waivers, age ranges and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and consultation time.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of knowledge of policies and procedures for professional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of knowledge of policies and procedures for professional staff.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Midland Park Public Schools on February, 16, 2005. 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has brought about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many identified areas were corrected 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 special education data indicated that for 2004, the district was educating over 57% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day which is significantly higher than the state average of 41.6%. According to the Annual Data Report, 17.9% of preschool disabled students attend a separate public school. These students are actually in their home school and are enrolled in a hearing impaired program offered by Bergen County Special Services. Students have opportunities for inclusion with their nondisabled peers as a result of the collaboration between the community pre-school, the preschool disabled program and the kindergarten class.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs, services and staff. Parents were especially pleased with the many programs and services provided within the district that provides significant opportunities for placement within the general education settings. Many parents expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement in the IEP process and the receptiveness of the case managers and the Director of Special Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and services, goals and objectives for related services, documentation of frequency, duration, location of related services, length of school day and year, transfer procedures, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, identification meetings, participants and timelines, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, acceptance of reports, re-evaluation timelines, re-evaluation planning meetings and participants, re-evaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, general education access in district, continuum, age 14 transition service needs, preference and interests, surveys and assessments, age 16 needed transition services, agency invitation, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation

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determination, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessment, IEP requirements at age 14, out of district participation in graduation exercises, written notice of graduation, class sizes and waivers, age ranges and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding facilities, notice of meetings when transition is discussed, consideration of independent evaluations, procedures for pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screening, date-stamping new referrals, rejection of reports with rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents, vocational school participants, present levels of educational performance, strengths and parental concerns in IEP for students eligible for speech and language services, 90-day timelines, consideration of supplemental aids and services, notification of non-academic and extracurricular participation for out-of-district students, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool program by age 3, consent to conduct interest inventories, documentation to case manager, documentation to building administrators identifying potentially disabled students so procedural safeguards can be provided, alternate proficiency assessment knowledge, knowledge of statewide assessments, and knowledge of policies and procedures for professional staff.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations in speech language reports and documentation in the IEP of two issues regarding least restrictive environment.

During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the self-identified areas of notice of meetings when transition is discussed, consideration of independent evaluations, health summary, vision and hearing screening, date-stamping new referrals, rejection of reports with rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents, vocational school participants, present levels of educational performance, strengths and parental concerns in IEP for students eligible for speech and language services, ninety day timelines, notification of non-academic and extracurricular participation for out-of-district students, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool program by age 3, consent to conduct interest inventories, documentation to case manager, documentation to building administrators identifying potentially disabled students so procedural safeguards can be provided, alternate proficiency assessment knowledge, knowledge of statewide assessments, common planning time for general education and special education collaboration and knowledge of policies and procedures for professional staff

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Midland Park Public Schools will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the area that requires revision.