

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Millburn School District

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: December 10, 11, and 12, 2002

Monitoring Team: Damen Cooper, Janet Wright, Zola Mills, Gladys Miller, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Jenifer Tucci

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Millburn School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Millburn 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 Millburn 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 Board of Education building on December 3, 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, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its collaboration with the Lovaas Institute which afforded the district the opportunity to develop expertise in providing programs and services for students with autism.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district is also commended for creating an in-district life skills program in response to the needs of the middle and high school level student population. As a result, students who would otherwise be educated in out-of-district programs now have the opportunity to receive these services in their neighborhood school.

The district is further commended for creating a fully accessible playground at the site of its preschool program and its commitment to create that type of playground to two other sites.

The district provides a highly developed post-secondary transition program that assists special education students in developing self-awareness, self-advocacy and career goals. This program has won numerous awards and has been recognized for exemplary practices.

The district also provides a behaviorist and social skills trainers who provide training to students with disabilities, staff and parents.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional/parent development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 extended school year, length of day/year, transfer students and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of speech therapy and adaptive physical education. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities. This information has been provided to the county office.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notice of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals, and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Identification Meeting Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that because both parent and pupil assistance committee referrals were inconsistently dated, twenty-day identification meeting timelines could not be verified.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure referrals are dated. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring, interview and record review indicated that written reports are not consistently dated. As a result, it could not be determined when these reports were developed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all written reports are dated. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria and documentation of eligibility.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding statement of eligibility and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that eligibility statements were included in speech therapy evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech assessment reports do not include eligibility statements since the determination of eligibility may only be made by an appropriately configured IEP team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Copy of Evaluation Reports to Parents - During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that although evaluation reports were provided, they are not provided ten days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant 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 participants, considerations/required statements, age of majority, implementation dates and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, ninety-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access to the IEP and the provision of a copy of the IEP to parents prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 areas of age fourteen transition service needs, courses of study, preferences/interests, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement and student agency invite.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of common planning time and class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 requests, access sheets and maintenance.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff knowledge of student records policies and procedures. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Millburn School District on December 10, 11 and 12, 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 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 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, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents also expressed concerns with issues that had been identified by the district during self-assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, length of day/year, transfer students, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, consideration/required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, least restrictive environment, age fourteen transition service needs, courses and preferences, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, student/agency invite, pre-school transition planning conference, discipline procedures, statewide assessments, graduation requirements, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, related services, surrogate parents, Child Find, referral process/pre-referral interventions, vision and hearing screenings, accept/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, ninety day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, copy of IEP to parents prior to implementation, transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, common planning time, class description and staff knowledge of student records policy and procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, identification meeting timelines, written reports, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents and documentation of other locations of student records.

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