

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

District: Millstone Township School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: December 1, 2003

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Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Millstone 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 Millstone 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 Millstone 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 Millstone Township School District on October 14, 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, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

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District Strengths:

The district is commended for developing a support group for **parents of special needs students** and child study team member entitled, “**P.O.S.S.**” The formation of the group began last year and members meet monthly to discuss current special education trends, dialogue in a supportive environment and provide parent training opportunities. Additionally, as indicated at the public focus group meeting, parents expressed their overwhelming satisfaction with the district’s commitment to ensure their inclusion in all processes that involve their children.

Data Summary:

During the 2001-2002 school year, the Millstone Township School District reported a classification rate of 12.9% which is below the state average of 13.4%. Data submitted by the district for students ages 6-21, indicated that 40.6% of their special needs students are educated in the mainstream greater than 80% of the time with their non-disabled peers while the state data reflects a greater margin of 41.6%. Additionally, for preschool disabled students, ages 3-5, district data indicated that the Millstone Township School District is well behind the state average for placement in/access to general education. 86.4% of these students are placed in settings that do not offer access to general education. The district has identified least restrictive environment/decision-making/continuum of program options and regular education access for preschool disabled students as areas of concern through the self-assessment process and has addressed these concerns through their improvement plan.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Program and Services and Student Records 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs/related services, frequency, duration and location, length of school day, facilities and certification of staff.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and transfer student procedures. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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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 areas of consent, content and provision of notices for students eligible for special education and related services, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding notices in native language. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area. Additionally, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents and provision of written notices to parents of students eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan is sufficient.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, vision/hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of identification meeting participants. The improvement plan is sufficient. Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding health summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not have outreach activities in place to identify students ages 3 through 21 including homeless and migrant students who may be potentially disabled.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities are developed and implemented for students ages 3 through 21, including homeless and migrant students who may be potentially disabled. These activities must be conducted throughout the year. These activities will ensure that all students who reside within the district and may be disabled are identified and referred to the district's child study team.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports with rationale for students eligible for special education/related services and students eligible for speech/language services. Additionally, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments and written reports signed and dated for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of written reports by speech/language therapists. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding speech/language evaluation reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech/language Evaluation Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that when developed, speech/language evaluation reports do not contain an educational impact statement from the classroom teacher which fulfills the multi-disciplinary component of the evaluation and inconsistently contain various components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure speech/language reports include all required components for a multi-disciplinary and functional assessment. These activities will ensure that evaluators include all assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations for students demonstrating speech/language difficulties that impact their ability to acquire educational skills. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and provision of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of agreement/disagreement with rationale. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Evaluation Reports to Parents of Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech/language therapists do not provide copies of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that speech/language therapists provide parents with copies of evaluation reports at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference and that the provision is documented in student files. Implementation of these activities will enable parents to review the evaluation results prior to the eligibility conference and to determine if another person who is knowledgeable about the student should also attend the conference. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meeting participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates and annual review timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 90-day timeline and teacher access/responsibility for IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of IEPs to parents of students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of IEPs to Parents of Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech/language therapists do not provide copies of IEPs to parents prior to implementation of program and services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that speech/language therapists provide parents with a copy of the student's IEP prior to the implementation of program and services and that the provision of IEPs is documented in the student's file. These activities will ensure parents are fully informed of the details regarding the agreed upon program and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of least restrictive environment/decision-making/continuum of program options/regular education access with supplemental aids and services **for school-aged students** and notification/participation for out-of-district students in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of least restrictive environment/decision-making/continuum of program options and regular education access with supplemental aids and services **for pre-school disabled students**. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

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

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 agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transition service needs, student invitation and attainment of student interest/preferences. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 Millstone Township School District on December 1, 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 further commended for the prompt implementation of the improvement plan activities to address some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. The district is also 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 by indicating that the programs offered exceeded their expectations. Parents feel included in the IEP process. They are appropriately notified to participate in all meetings and they find the child study team flexible in rescheduling meetings and/or offering opportunities for parents to participate via teleconferencing. Parents who attended the evening focus group meeting indicated that they were not aware of any barriers to the provision of services.

A review of the data indicated that Millstone Township School District reported a classification rate of 12.9% which is below the state average of 13.4%. The data further indicated that 40.6% of students ages 6-21 are educated in the mainstream greater than 80% of the time with their non-disabled peers. However, for preschool disabled students, district data indicated that the district is well behind the state average for placement in/access to general education. The district self-identified least restrict environment for preschool-aged students as an area of need and it has developed an improvement plan which is sufficient to address these concerns.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, General Provisions, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of programs/related services, frequency/duration/location, length of school day, facilities, certification of staff, consent, content and provision of notices for students eligible for special education and related services, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports

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with rationale for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services, multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated for students eligible for special education and related services, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, provision of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for special education and related services, IEP meeting participants, consideration/required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, least restrictive environment/ decision-making/continuum of program options and regular education access with supplemental aids and services for school-aged students, notification/participation for out-of-district students in non-academic and extra-curricular activities, pre-school transition planning conferences, early intervention to preschool by age 3 and agency invitation to transition meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, transfer student procedures, surrogate parents, notices in native language, provision of written notice to parents of students eligible for speech/language services, identification meeting participants, health summaries, written reports by speech and language therapists, agreement and/or disagreement with rationale, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility for implementing IEPs, least restrictive environment/decision-making, continuum of program options and regular education access for preschool disabled students, transition service needs, student invitation and student interest and preferences.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding Child Find, speech/language evaluation reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for speech/language services and provision of IEPs to parents for students eligible for speech/language services.

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