

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

District: Milltown School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: April 7, 2005

Monitoring Team: Barbara J. Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Milltown School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Milltown School District 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 Milltown 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 Parkview School, on April 7, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the desk audit, 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its peer tutoring program which pairs academically successful seventh and eighth students with fourth, fifth and sixth grade students who are struggling academically. Students with special needs participate and benefit from this program, which is under the supervision of a general education teacher and school psychologist.

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The district also provides an **Organizational Skills Program** which targets the student with weak organizational skills. Special needs and 504 students participate in and benefit from the program which teaches them study skills, time management skills and organizational strategies. A general education teacher and school psychologist supervise the program and provide one-to one instructional assistance.

In addition, the district has recently introduced a **Circle of Friends** which is a program initiated in response to the social-emotional needs of a student with multiple disabilities. Twenty students volunteered to be his buddy in lunch, specials, and offered to invite him to their homes to play and for birthday parties.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Eligibility and Transition, Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring process.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's placement rates indicated that during school year 2003, for students ages 3-5, 77.8% were placed in integrated preschool settings. The district exceeded the state average in this area by more than 68%. Additionally, during 2003, for students ages 6-21, the district educated 43.9% of them in settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. The district has consistently been above the state average in this area. When compared to the state average, district data indicated that during the last three school years, there has been a decrease in the classification rate of students, ages of 3-21. This attributed was to the effective referral process, as well as improved general education resources and programs which the district has in place. The district is commended for the initiative to educate more diverse learners in the context of general education.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance 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 staff training. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of related services, goals and objectives for related services, length of school year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of hearing aid checks. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parent and interpreters at meetings. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health, vision and hearing summaries and identification meeting/ participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child find. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of teacher's impact statement in functional assessments and acceptance/rejection of reports from other professionals/agencies/schools. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings/participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of required statements in speech/language IEPs. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, general education access, notification to out-of-district students regarding non-academic/extra-curricular activities in district and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of supplementary aides and services. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavioral improvement plans, manifestation determination meetings and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff knowledge. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

Section XIII: Graduation is not applicable in this K-8 district.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parental rights. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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Summary

A special education monitoring was conducted in the Milltown School District on April 7, 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.

At a focus group meeting on April 7, 2005, parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs, services and staff and agreed that the Milltown School district provides a very high quality of education for their students. Parents of preschoolers praised the district for ensuring a smooth transition process for their child from the early intervention program to the district's preschool disabled program. All parents stated that they are involved and given an opportunity to participate in the education of their child.

Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition, Programs and Services were determined to be areas demonstrating compliance with all standards by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies, procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of related services, goals and objectives for related services, length of school year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health/vision/hearing summaries, identification meeting and participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, general education access, notification to out-of-district students regarding non-academic and extra-curricular activities in district, continuum of programs, student participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, parental access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of the location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, hearing aid checks, surrogate parent, interpreters at meetings, child find, teacher's impact statement in functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports from other professionals, agencies and schools, required statements in speech and language IEPs, supplementary aides and services, staff knowledge and parental rights.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

The improvement plan submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education in June of 2004 will be forwarded to the Director, Office of Special Education Programs for approval. Verification of implementation of the improvement of will be conducted by the County Office of Education.