

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Mine Hill School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: January 10 – 11, 2005

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

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the **Mine Hill School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Mine Hill 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 **Mine Hill 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 to verifying the self-assessment findings, to assessing appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Canfield Elementary School on January 11, 2005. This meeting was originally scheduled for January 5, 2005; however, due to inclement weather the meeting was rescheduled. Information obtained from this meeting as well as additional parent interviews by phone was used for this monitoring on-site.

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. 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for implementing its Jump Ahead program. This enrichment program is offered across grade levels. Both general and special education students

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participate in this program which meets during the morning hours on Mondays through Thursdays. Students utilize computer programs to enhance their knowledge in mathematics and language arts literacy.

The district is further commended for the development of their new Learning Lab. The lab is equipped with ten new computers with specific programs tailored to develop skills for at risk students. Software implemented in this program includes Co writer, Draft Builder, Intelli Mathics and Kidspiration.

The district also provides various after school programs that incorporate district families. The programs are offered from pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade. Six teachers have been trained during this school year through Rutgers University to facilitate specific subject areas including, music, art, reading, science, mathematics. Family science, family tools and technology and web page design are other courses offered in the program.

Data Summary:

A review of the district data shows that 70% of with disabilities preschool students are placed in general education early childhood settings which is above the state average of 54.4%. Additionally, the district data reflect that they are above the state average rate for inclusion of special education students ages 6-21 for 40% to 80% of the school day. The districts average is 68% compared to the state average of 30.3%. The district's classification rate is 14.7% which slightly exceeds the state average of 14.3%. The district has developed an improvement plan that with some revisions will expand the use of pre-referral interventions within general education which is expected to bring this rate within the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Individualized Education Program, Preschool Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and 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 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 provision of programs and related services of speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling, length of day and year, transfer students and facilities.

During the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and the on-site visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding extended school year and certifications.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the district only considered and discussed extended school year services

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for students determined eligible for special education and related services not students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that extended school year is considered and documented at meetings for every student receiving special education and speech language services and is provided when needed. Additionally, IEPs will include a description of the program, implementation dates, and frequency, duration and location of services. Implementation of these activities will ensure every student who requires extended school year programming to address identified issues of regression and recoupment will receive the mandated services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Certifications - During the on-site monitoring, interviews indicated that special education teachers are teaching in dual capacity roles without dual certification and/or teachers are fulfilling teaching roles in which they were not contractually hired.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure all classes are taught by appropriately certified teachers. Implementation of these activities will ensure staff is appropriately certified and assigned accordingly. Notes say notify county**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notices, native language notices and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of need.

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 compliance in the areas of referral process, direct referrals and identification meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of Child Find. **The district plan is insufficient to address the area of pre-referral interventions as it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the interventions and an administrative component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of obtaining sufficient information to determine the nature and scope of students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's plan is insufficient to address this area because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. ??**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, notification of out of district students, nonacademic & extracurricular activities and continuum.

An area of need was identified during the on-site regarding documentation of least restrictive environment.

Area(s) of Need:

Least Restrictive Environment Documentation – During the on-site monitoring visit, record review and interview indicated that IEP teams do not consistently include all four statements required in IEPs when considering the least restrictive environment. Therefore, LRE is not addressed appropriately.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications, the explanation of why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate and documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. Implementation of these activities will ensure that appropriate considerations are discussed and placement decisions are based on the needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent compliant implementation of the activities. It is recommended that the district adopt the LRE page from the model IEP developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

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Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access and requests and maintenance and destruction.

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 **Mine Hill School District** on January 10 & 11, 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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan 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.

A review of data indicated the district has a rate of classification only slightly above the state average. Improvements in its Intervention and Referral Services and the expansion of general education resources may be having a positive impact.

At a focus group meeting held during the monitoring visit and additional parent interviews parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In general the district was praised for the current high quality of staff and professionalism. Some parents noted concern regarding their lack of knowledge pertaining to the availability of extended school year programs that students may be eligible for. However, overall parents stressed their satisfaction with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children.

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, provision of programs for related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, referral process, direct referrals, identification meetings and timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th, eligibility meeting and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, notification and participation of our of district students, nonacademic and extra curricular activities, continuum, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention planning to preschool by age three, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate education setting, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, speech group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access and requests.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents, independent evaluations, child find, pre-referral interventions, nature and scope for students' eligible of speech and language services.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, certifications, screenings for students eligible for speech and language services and LRE documentation.

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