

New Jersey Department of Education
Special Education Monitoring

District: Monroe Township School District **County:** Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: November 13, 14 and 15, 2001

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin, Mary Heade, Jane Marano and Arlene Popovici

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Monroe Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Monroe 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 Monroe 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 a first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for the parents and community members at the Oak Knoll Elementary School, on November 7, 2001. Information obtained from the meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district should be commended for its commitment of both time and resources regarding training and implementation of a full-inclusion program. This Team Approach to Mastery (TAM) is based on a program that has been successfully implemented since

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1975, in Christina, Delaware. The model utilizes a co-teaching classroom taught by a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. These teachers share all responsibilities and aspects of the classroom. TAM provides a transitional program between regular education and self-contained special education classrooms. Students who are selected for this program are typically those students whom the district believes will eventually return to a regular education program. The Holy Glen School has been selected as the pilot site. TAM will be implemented at each grade level from Kindergarten to 5th. A total of ten teachers of the handicapped will be needed for 110 students. To further ensure the successful implementation of this program, the district has hired a consulting group, from Delaware, to train staff and to assist in the program's implementation.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures, and professional staff and parent trainings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

No additional area of need was 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 length of day/year, occupational therapy (OT), counseling, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, the provision of related services (physical therapy and speech), transportation for out-of-district students and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address transportation and related services. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address extended school year and transfer students because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site, regarding facilities. The county office is currently addressing this issue with the district.

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, written notice, meetings, native language, and transfer of rights. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address the areas of surrogate parents and transfer of rights because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address written notice and native language. The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes in these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting.

Area of Need:

Notice of a Meeting – During the on-site visit, a review of the district's notice of a meeting indicated the district is not identifying meeting participants by discipline and teachers are not identified as regular education or special education teachers. Additionally, the notice does not include indicate the student will be invited to participate when transition is being discussed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure notice of a meeting includes all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals by parents and staff, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings including timelines and participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address Child Find and ID meetings. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address the referral process, health summaries, and vision and hearing screenings because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding summer referrals.

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Area of Need:

Summer Referrals – During the on-site visit, staff indicated that during the summer regular education teachers do not participate in meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers are available to participate in meetings conducted during the summer. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of 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 standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments, written reports and curriculum-based assessments. The district developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure procedures are being fully implemented.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines and participants at planning meetings. The district developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was 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 eligibility meetings and documentation of eligibility.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with determination of eligibility based on required criteria and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of 90-day timeline.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, goals and objectives, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and teacher knowledge of and access to IEPs. The district developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the areas of goals and objectives, implementation dates, and teacher knowledge and access. The plan is insufficient to address the areas of participants and annual review timelines because it lacks an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding considerations and required statements.

Area of Need:

Considerations and Required Statements – During the on-site visit, a review of student records and staff interviews indicated that although the IEP contains sections that identified required considerations and statements, they are not consistently filled in to ensure the development of an IEP that contains required information.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the development of IEPs that include all required information. It is recommended the district adopt the model IEP form developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in nonacademic/extracurricular activities and continuum of options.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, *Oberti*, regular education access, and supplementary aids and services. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks appropriate timelines, procedures, in-

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service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP implementation by age three. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

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

Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding the statement of transition service needs for students age 14, or younger, and consideration of student's preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding, student/agency invitations to IEP meetings, agency involvement, and the statement of needed transition services for students 16 or older. The district developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components. Additionally, the projected timeline for age 16 needed transition services must be revised to reflect a more reasonable initiation date.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding procedures for removal for 10 days or less, suspension tracking, and interim alternative educational settings (IAES).

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding written notification to the case manager, functional behavioral assessments (FBA) and behavioral intervention plans (BIP), manifestation determinations, consultation with

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special education teachers when short term removals are not a change in placement, removal from program for dangerousness or controlled substance, provision of procedural safeguards for students who have been identified as potentially disabled, and the provision of information to authorities of a student who has been arrested. The district has not submitted an improvement plan that addresses these areas of need. The district must revise the plan to include procedures, in-services training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation and approved accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP documentation and alternate assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these components.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Area of Need:

Notice of Graduation – During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents and adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of notice of graduation to parents and adult students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the sample Notice of Graduation form developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size and age-range.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding group size for speech therapy at the high school and home instruction.

Area of Need:

Home Instruction – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated the district does not request county office approval prior to implementing a program of home instruction. Additionally, the district does not have a system in place that allows them to ensure students are receiving the required hours of instruction while on home instruction.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district obtains county office approval prior to implanting a program of home instruction. The plan must also ensure that once approved, the district provides the services required by the IEP. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Group Sizes for Speech Therapy – During the on-site visit to the high school, it was determined that group sizes for speech therapy exceeded five students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that group sizes for speech therapy at the high school do not exceed five students. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent/adult student access to records and maintenance and destruction of records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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Area of Need:

Location of Student Records – During the on-site visit, a review of central files indicated the district does not document where other records may be located.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Monroe Township School District on November 13, 14 and 15, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is also commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. The district is further commended for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs for students with disabilities and for the level of documentation maintained by the child study team members in student files.

At a focus group meeting, held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. There were five parents, three staff and two monitors in attendance at this meeting. Some of the concerns expressed included issues related to communication, progress documentation and reporting, training for bus aides, and case manager follow-up.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of day/year, occupational therapy, counseling, certification, consent, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meetings including timelines and participants, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, planning meetings, turning age five, eligibility meetings and documentation, 90-day timelines, participation in non-academic/extracurricular activities, continuum of options, preschool transition planning conferences, statement of transition for 14 year olds, consideration of student's preferences and interests, suspension tracking, interim alternative education settings, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP requirements, diploma, graduation participation, class size, age-range, and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional and staff development, extended school year, the provision of related services (physical therapy and speech), transportation for out-of-district students, transfers, surrogate parents, written notice, meetings, native language, transfer of rights, multi-disciplinary, curriculum-based and functional assessments, written reports, timelines, participants at planning meetings, determination of eligibility, provision of evaluation reports to parents, participation at IEP meetings, goals and objectives, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and access to IEPs, individualized decision-making, *Oberti*, regular education access, supplementary aids and services, IEP implementation by age three, student/agency invitation to IEP meetings, agency involvement, statement of agency transition services for students 16 years and older, written notification of discipline to case manager, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, written

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notification of graduation to in district and out of district students, home instruction, group size of speech therapy at the high school, parent/student access to records, and maintenance and destruction of records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notice of meetings, summer referrals, considerations and required statements, notification of graduation, group sizes for speech therapy at the high school, and location of student records.

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