

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

District: Montague School District

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: May 27, 2003

Monitoring Team: Damen Cooper and Janet Wright

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Montague School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Montague 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 Montague 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 Montague School District on May 19, 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.

District Strengths:

The district provides the LEAP (learning enrichment academic program) program. Students in this program received second place honors by the New Jersey Bar Association. The program is designed for students, including students with disabilities, to increase their debate skills as well as to increase academic team work.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Programs and Services was determined to be an area 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 and parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 and year, transfer students and certifications.

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

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notices of meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Notices of Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that notices of meetings are inconsistently sent to parents.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure that notices of meetings are sent to parents and copies are maintained in the student files. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure that consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, health summaries and identification meeting participants and timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of referral process and PAC procedures. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of standardized assessments. **The district has not submitted activities to address this area of need. The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports for related services, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that eligibility determinations are included in assessment reports developed by related service providers.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that related service providers do not include eligibility determinations in their individual assessment reports since these determinations may only be made by an appropriately configured team.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure that consistent implementation of the procedure.

Bilingual Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring, staff indicated that currently there is no one in the district nor is there a contract in place with an outside agency to conduct bilingual evaluations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district conducts bilingual assessments when necessary. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure staff are available to conduct these assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure that consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that although outside evaluations are submitted by parents, teams are not either accepting or rejecting these reports or parts of these reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the team appropriately documents the acceptance and or rejection of outside assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

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

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

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 area of meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, criteria and copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of eligibility (see section V).

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, consideration and required statements, annual review timelines and teacher knowledge access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of goals and objective aligned to the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of implementation dates. **The district has not submitted an improvement plan to address this area of need. The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The district further identified concerns in the area of ninety-day timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. 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 (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti, consideration and documentation, supplementary aids and services and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of nonacademic and extra-curricular participation. 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 Preschool

Summary of Findings:

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding preschool transition planning conferences.

Area(s) of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that district staff are not invited to or attending preschool transition planning conferences. Additionally, during staff interviews it was determined staff were unaware that they were required to attend these meetings.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that district staff are in attendance at preschool transition planning conferences and conferences are documented in the student's file. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination and interim alternative education setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures and documentation to case managers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were 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, IEP documentation and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of approved accommodations and modifications. 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 parent and adult student access, access sheets, maintenance and destruction.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Locations – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews indicated that the central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

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

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Montague School District on May 27. 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 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, the one parent in attendance expressed her satisfaction with the district's provision of special education services.

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 information, extended school year, length of day and year, transfer students, certifications, consent, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, turning age five, IEP meetings, participants, consideration and required statements, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and access, individualized decision making, Oberti, consideration and documentation, supplementary aids and services, continuum, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, statewide assessment participation, IEP documentation, alternative assessments, programs and services, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, related services, surrogate parents, written notice, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, health summaries, identification meeting participants, standardized assessments, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents, goal and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, regular education access for preschool, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, discipline procedures, documentation of case manager and approved accommodations and modifications.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, notice of meetings, written reports for related service providers, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, documentation of eligibility, preschool transition planning conference, and documentation of other location of student records.

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