

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

**District:** Montclair

**County:** Essex

**Monitoring Dates:** April 9 – April 12, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** Stephanie DeBruyne, Zola Mills, and Janet Wright

**Background Information**

During the 2000 - 2001 school year, the Montclair School District conducted a self-assessment to determine whether the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to gather and review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

Parents and staff were invited to attend a public focus group meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Information collected by the district was the basis for its self-assessment document that cites strengths and areas of need. The district developed activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified by the district as areas of need.

A second public focus group meeting was held in the district on March 28, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had some concerns.

**District Strengths**

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district has established a Special Education Parent Advisory Council. These parents, in conjunction with the parents from the PTA Council, are taking an active role in the activities identified in the district's special education improvement plan. A brochure has been designed outlining their roles and the activities they will be engaged in.

The district has established a system of support for students in the high school. Teachers of the handicapped assigned to resource programs (both in-class support and pull-out replacement) are assigned to a group of students to ensure that programs are meeting their respective educational needs. This system of support, identified in IEPs as a supplementary aid and service, is incorporated into the teachers' daily schedules.

The district has been operating a regular early childhood program for four-year-old students for many years. The Montclair Community Pre-K will provide opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers.

The district has established Project STARS, an academic support program in reading, writing, and/or math for students at risk. Components of this program include individual or small group assistance, academic tutoring and a summer enrichment program.

The district continues to sponsor numerous Parent Expositions throughout the school year. The Expositions include keynote speakers, workshops, and resource fairs.

## **Section I: General Provisions**

### **Summary of Findings:**

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need related to policies and procedures and staff development. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

## **Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education**

### **Summary of Findings:**

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year programs, accessibility of facilities, oversight of the implementation of IEPs for students in out-of-district placements, provision of APE and transfer student procedures. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses most of these areas of need.

During the self-assessment process, the district further identified the need for related service providers. However, their improvement plan only addressed the tracking of these services, not the need for new staff. The district self-assessment also identified the development of an interim IEP for transfer students as an area of need. However, the plan did not include activities to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation of the IEP.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Related Services** – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that they

must act in a more timely fashion to address vacancies or long-term absences of service providers. However, the improvement plan only indicated that a tracking system of the delivery of services would be developed. It did not identify how it would determine the need for additional staff or how related services staff would be recruited.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to identify how it will determine the need for additional staff members and the methods it will use to employ sufficient staff in the event that need is identified.**

**Transfer Students** – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that when records from a previous school district are incomplete or not available, an interim IEP needs to be developed and evaluations need to be completed in a more timely manner. Improvement plan activities were not submitted to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure the timely development of interim IEPs and the timely completion of evaluations determined necessary by the IEP team. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these procedures.**

**IEP Implementation** - During the on-site visit, an area of need was identified regarding the implementation of IEPs when in-class support was required. A review of IEPs and class rosters, coupled with staff interviews, determined that the IEPs are not implemented as written. Though IEPs indicated the in-class teacher would be present for the entire period, staff interviews indicated the teacher was only there for a part of the period or when the regular education teacher felt the student required additional assistance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure in-class support services are provided as specified in the IEP.**

### **Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding timelines, native language, independent evaluations, and surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the age of majority.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Age of Majority** – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through a review of IEPs and interviews with district staff, that parents and students were being informed of the transfer of rights one year before the student reaches the age of majority, instead of three years.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that students and parents are notified three years before the student reaches the age of majority that the transfer of rights will occur when the student turns eighteen.**

#### **Section IV: Location, Referral, and Identification**

##### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding child find, timelines and conducting identification meetings. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings and maintaining documentation of the effectiveness of interventions in general education.

##### **Areas of Need:**

**Vision and Hearing Screenings** – A review of records and interviews with staff indicated that there is confusion regarding the requirement to obtain vision and hearing screenings when a student is referred to the child study team. Staff interviews at the preschool, elementary and middle school levels indicated a number of different practices regarding this issue that resulted in the inconsistent application of procedures to ensure each referred student was screened.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that vision and hearing screenings are conducted when a student is referred to the child study team. The plan must include an oversight component and an in-service component to ensure staff are implementing these procedures appropriately and consistently.**

**Documentation of the effectiveness of interventions in general education** – During the on-site visit a review of student records determined that referrals to the child study team after interventions were implemented via the PAC process, did not contain written documentation of the implementation and effectiveness of these interventions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written documentation of the implementation and effectiveness of interventions in general education is maintained in the student record.**

## **Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district identified areas of need regarding components of functional assessments, acceptance/ rejection of reports, and ninety-day timelines. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding components of written reports.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Components of Written Reports** - During the on-site visit, a review of assessment reports for students determined eligible for special education and related services and for students determined eligible for speech and language services indicated they were not consistently dated nor did they include instructional implications.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written reports are dated and include all required components.**

## **Section VI: Reevaluation**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district identified an area of need regarding timelines for re-evaluations. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of attempts to obtain parental consent for additional assessments.

### **Area of Need:**

**Parental Consent** – During the on-site, a review of student records indicated the district does not obtain written parental consent when additional assessments are required and the parent does not attend the reevaluation planning meeting. During the interview process, staff indicated they contact the parent and obtain verbal consent, instead.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure all attempts to obtain consent are documented prior to conducting additional**

**assessments during the reevaluation process.**

## **Section VII: Eligibility**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district identified an area of need regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan will not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the appropriate and consistent implementation of these procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility statements in evaluation reports and written reports for ESL students conducted during the reevaluation process.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Eligibility Statements** – A review of records indicated that evaluation reports for students determined eligible for speech and language services contained a statement of eligibility at the end of the report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure an appropriately configured IEP team makes eligibility determinations. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the statement of eligibility is documented appropriately in the student record and not in assessment reports.**

**Written Reports** – A review of records indicated speech/language specialists do not develop written reports that contained all required components after conducting a speech/language assessment during the reevaluation process for students determined eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written reports contain all required components.**

## **Section VIII: Individualized Education Program**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding annual review timelines; participants at IEP meetings; components, considerations, and required statements in IEPs; teacher access to IEPs; and providing copies of IEPs to parents in a timely manner. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

## **Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding a continuum of placement options; regular education access for special education students; documentation of the individual decision-making process; and the participation of students in out-of-district placements in non-academic and extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

## **Section X: Transition**

### **A. Transition to Preschool**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding the consistent participation of a CST member at Preschool Transition Planning conferences. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area of need.

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

#### **Area of Need:**

**Preschool Transition Planning Conference** – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that there was a need for a child study team member to participate in the preschool transition planning conference on a consistent basis.

Interviews with team members indicated the district does participate in the Preschool Transition Planning conference but does not document that participation in the student record.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that a child study team member attends the preschool transition planning conference and that this participation is documented in the student record.**

## **B. Transition from School to Post-School**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transition service needs at age 14, needed transition services at age 16 and agency involvement. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the provision of invitations to students and agencies.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of invitations to IEP meetings to students and agencies** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through the interview process indicated that invitations to IEP meetings are sent to both students and agencies involved in post-school activities. Staff reported that attendance is usually good, and participants do sign an attendance sheet. Staff did acknowledge that agency representatives were not indicating their agency affiliation on the sign-in sheet. A review of records confirmed this information. However, a review of records further indicated that copies of these notices were not maintained in the files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that copies of invitations to students and agencies are maintained in the student files. Furthermore, the plan will include a component to ensure signatures of participants clearly identify the agency representatives and their specific affiliations.**

## **Section XI: Discipline**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding interim alternative educational settings (IAES) and documentation of suspensions to the case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

## **Section XII: Statewide Assessment**



### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding the alternate assessment and indicated that they were waiting for the state to develop an alternate assessment. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address this area need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of approved accommodations /modifications for statewide assessment.

### **Area of Need:**

**Approved Accommodations/Modifications** – In an interview with the director, it was indicated that students with disabilities are not receiving approved accommodations/modifications as specified in their IEPs when participating in statewide assessments at the high school level.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure approved accommodations/modifications as required by IEPs are provided. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure staff are aware of these required accommodations.**

**Alternate Assessment** – The district self-assessment indicated that there was a need to specify an alternate assessment in the IEPs of students who are exempted from participating in statewide assessments.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure IEPs identify those students who will be participating in the alternate assessment.**

## **Section XIII: Graduation Requirements**

### **Summary of Finding:**

The district accurately assessed compliance with IEP documentation of graduation requirements, compliance with participation in graduation exercises, and compliance with awarding of a diploma to all students with disabilities that complete graduation requirements.

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

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Written Notice of Graduation** – Interviews with staff and a review of records determined that when a student is completing their last year in school, an “exit

conference” is held. However, a review of the letter issued to the parent and adult student indicated it did not contained the required components of notice. The director indicated he intended to adopt the state’s model notice forms.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure parents and adult students receive appropriate written notice of graduation.**

## **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding consultation time. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding in-class support group sizes in the high school.

### **Area of Need:**

**In-class support group sizes** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through a review of class rosters and interviews that there were too many classified students assigned to in-class support classes in the high school.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that class sizes comply with those established in code. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures throughout the school year.**

## **Section XV: Student Records**

### **Summary of Finding:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training and parent and adult student rights as they pertain to record review. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the identification of the location of other records.

### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of other locations** – A review of central files during the on-site visit determined there was no indication of the location of other records maintained by the district.

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

## **Summary**

This on-site monitoring visit was conducted in the Montclair School District from April 9 – April 12, 2000 after a public focus group meeting. 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 self-identify most areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, parents expressed 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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding their policies and procedures; staff development; extended school year considerations; related services; transfer students; facility issues; oversight issues; adapted physical education; timelines; native language issues; surrogate parents; independent evaluations; child find activities; identification meetings; functional assessments; acceptance and rejections of reports; provision of copies of evaluation reports and IEPs; participants at IEP meetings; IEP components, considerations, and required statements; teacher access to IEPs; regular education access and lack of a continuum of program options; individual decision-making regarding placement; discipline issues; documentation of post-school transition requirements; and consultation time for resource program teachers and regular education teachers.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding implementation of IEPs; age of majority; vision and hearing screenings; consent issues; documenting participation in the preschool transition planning conference; provision of invitations to students and agencies; alternate assessments; modifications and accommodations; provision of written notice of graduation; and documentation of the location of pupil records.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to revise its improvement plan to address the additional areas of need and to resubmit the plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.