

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Montvale School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: October 27 and 28, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Montvale School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Montvale 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 Montvale 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education 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. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed in person and by phone.

Data Summary:

A three year review of the district's data from 2001 to 2003 of the placement of students with disabilities in least restrictive settings indicates that the district is consistently educating over 60% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is significantly higher than the state average of 41.9%, 41.6% and 42.0% for the years considered. Additionally, the district has implemented an integrated preschool within the elementary setting. This has provided the opportunity for preschool students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled peers. A three year review for the data indicates that 44.4% in 2001, 38.8% in 2002 and in 2003, 31.25% of preschool students with disabilities were educated in the general education setting. These percentages are consistently above the state average.

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

Further, 80% of students with disabilities scored proficient on the Language Arts Section and 63.3% proficient on the Math Section of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge for grade 3 (NJASK3) in 2003-2004 school year. Similarly, 60% of students with disabilities have scored proficient on the Language Arts Section and 60% were proficient on the Math Section of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge for grade 4 (NJASK4) in 2003-2004 school year. Also, 70% of students with disabilities scored proficient on the Language Arts Section of the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) in 2003-2004 school year.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the New Jersey Department of Education during the monitoring process as compliant:

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- IEP
- Transition to Preschool
- Statewide Assessment

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the Department of Education as compliant.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
II. Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation • Provision of programs • Provision of related services
III. Procedural Safeguards- For students who may be eligible for speech and language services (ESLS) or eligible for special education and related services (ESERS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent • Implementation without undue delay • Provision of notice of a meeting • Meetings • Provision of written notice • Interpreters at meeting
IV. Location, Referral and Identification (LRI) - For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find Ages 3-21 • Referral process • Direct Referrals • Identification meeting timelines • Identification meeting participants
V. Evaluation - For students who may be ESLS or ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized Assessments • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators

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

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
VII. Eligibility - For students who may be ESL/ESERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Eligibility Criteria • Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale • Statement of eligibility (Severe Learning Disability)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities • Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs • Continuum of programs
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension tracking system • Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students • IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days • Procedures for determination of change in placement • Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan • Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement • Short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided • Interim Alternative Educational Settings • Manifestation determinations
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class size • Age range • Group size

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

Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an 'X' in the 'Needs Revision' column.

Section	Area	Improvement Plan Review		
		Sufficient	Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
FAPE	▪ Extended school year (ESY) determination – ESY is not considered for students receiving speech-language services	X		
	▪ Transfer procedures -	X		X
Procedural Safeguards	▪ Notice of a meeting –	X		X
	▪ Written notice-content – Written notices do not contain all required components	X		X
	▪ Notices in native language –	X		X
	▪ Independent Evaluations -	X		X
LRI	▪ Pre-referral interventions–	X		
	▪ Health summary –	X		
	▪ Vision and hearing screenings -	X		
Evaluation	▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations –	X		X
	▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS)	X		X
	▪ Functional assessments – Child Study Team (CST) and speech evaluations do not contain all required components	X		X
Eligibility	▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents – copies not provided 10 days prior to eligibility meeting	X		
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	▪ Placement decisions based on students’ individual needs	X		X
Discipline	▪ Notification of removal forwarded to case manager	X		
Programs and Services	▪ Common planning time	X		

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

Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the New Jersey Department of Education during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
Evaluation	Procedures when student is referred for speech but suspected disability is in the area of language.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that if a student is referred to the speech-language specialists, but suspected disability is in the area of language, that a properly configured identification meeting of the CST, including the speech-language specialist is conducted and if necessary, evaluations are conducted accordingly. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that when students are suspected of having a disability in the area of language, the nature and scope of all evaluations at the identification meeting include the appropriate assessments to establish the educational impact and eligibility (requiring a minimum of one child study team member's participation).
Transition to Adult Life	Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of "transition service needs"	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students beginning at age 14 include a statement of transition service needs. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that the IEPs include all required transition components.
	Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students and agencies are invited to participate in IEP meetings where transition will be discussed. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that all participants are invited to the IEP meeting.
Graduation Requirements	IEP Requirements	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students beginning at age 14 include graduation requirements. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that the IEPs include all required IEP components.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Montvale School District on October 27 and 28, 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that 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.

During interviews conducted with parents, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Most notably, parents are extremely pleased with the level of dedication on the part of the special education administrator, the child study team and the general and special education teachers. Parents feel that all district personnel work in the best interest of the children.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Reevaluation, IEP, Transition to Preschool and Statewide Assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation, provision of programs, provision of related services, consent, implementation without undue delay, provision of notice of a meeting, meetings, provision of written notice, interpreters at meeting, Child Find ages 3-21, referral process, direct Referrals, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, Standardized Assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators, meeting participants, eligibility criteria, signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale, statement of eligibility (Severe Learning Disability), notification and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs, continuum of programs, suspension tracking system, discipline procedures employed equitably for all students, IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days, procedures for determination of change in placement, procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment, development of behavior intervention plan, short-term removals resulting in a change of placement, short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided, interim alternative educational settings, manifestation determinations, class size, age range and group size.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, transfer procedures, content of a notice of a meeting, content of written notice, notices in native language, independent evaluations, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, educational impact statement for ESLs, functional assessments for ESERS and ESLs, copy of evaluation reports to parents, placement decisions based on students' individual needs, notification of removal forwarded to case manager and common planning time.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are transfer procedures, content of notice of a meeting, content of written notice, notices in native language, independent evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations, educational impact statement for ESLS, functional assessments for ESERS and ESLS and placement decisions based on students' individual needs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, procedures for evaluation when suspected disability is regarding language, LRE documentation, age 14 IEP transition requirements, agency and student invitation to meetings where transition is discussed and IEP graduation requirements at age 14.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Montvale School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.