

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

District: Morris Plains School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: May 10 & 11, 2004

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Morris Plains School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Morris Plains 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 Morris 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 Borough School on April 28, 2004. 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 is commended for its Transitional Kindergarten. This program is an alternate general education kindergarten offered within the district. It runs on a half day schedule in the afternoon rather than a full day schedule as does the traditional kindergarten in the district. This program focuses on readiness skills for kindergarten students who may

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need an additional year of pre-school. The same curriculum is used for both the Transitional Kindergarten as the traditional kindergarten, however modifications and accommodations are infused into the Transitional Kindergarten program. Both regular education and special education students are educated within this program.

The district is also commended for its "CHAMPS In Action" program at the Borough School. "CHAMPS In Action" is a cross-curricular, integrated unit of study taught in the third grade. The program focuses on parental involvement, enhancing self-esteem and developing mutual respect and understanding. "CHAMPS In Action" is currently a finalist for the State of New Jersey Best Practice in diversity award.

The district also provides the "Ears to Learning" program which focuses on listening skills and the "Ready, Aim and Shoot program, a multi-media program for their special education students.

The district reported that in 2003 both general education and special education students scored 100% proficient on the Language Arts Literacy section of the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment. In addition, all students scored 100% proficient in Science. The district is commended for achieving this standard.

Data Summary:

A review of the district data indicated the district is providing services to 47% of its students aged 6-21 in the regular education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This number is slightly above the state average 41.6%. To improve these data, the district developed a plan that included improvements to the decision-making process as well as increasing the alignment of goals & objectives to the core curriculum content standards. A review of the district's classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 16.8% as compared to the state's average of 14.9%. The district developed an improvement plan to address the referral process that included changes to its intervention and referral procedures.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation Requirements 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, parent development and dissemination of IDEA information.

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

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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, provision of related services for occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives for counseling, transfer students and hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of counseling services.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Counseling Services – During the on-site monitoring record review and interviews indicated that counseling services were not consistently being provided to students as required by their IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students receive counseling services as required by IEPs. If it is determined that the district does not have sufficient personnel to provide the required level of service, then the plan must also include activities to address this need. These activities may include seeking other resources within the district, redeploying child study team members or obtaining additional staff members. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings for age fourteen and written notices. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that although the district conducts child find activities for students ages three through five, the district does not conduct adequate child find activities to locate potentially disabled students between the ages of six and twenty-one.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure it develops and implements child find activities to locate, refer and identify all students within the district, including nonpublic, homeless and migrant children who may be in need of special education services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are provided with the necessary information to obtain services for their children in the event their children require special education.**

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, standardized assessments, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that evaluators' reports were not consistently signed and dated. As a result it was not possible to determine when these reports were developed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all evaluators' reports are consistently signed and dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the on-site monitoring, child study team members stated that they review and consider outside evaluations in determining an appropriate program. However, it was determined through record review that acceptance or rejection of outside reports is not consistently documented in the reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the child study team members consistently accept or reject reports or parts of reports conducted by outside agencies. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any report or parts of reports that were rejected by the child study team and the reason(s) why they were rejected. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting, participants at planning meeting, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation for change in eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit reevaluation timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluation Timelines – During the on-site monitoring visit record review and interviews indicated that reevaluation timelines for students eligible for special education and related services were not consistently met.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure it conducts reevaluation within three years of the previous determination of eligibility. These activities must include a tracking mechanism for administrators to ensure they have the ability to oversee timeline compliance and to take any necessary action in the event issues are identified.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria and statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting and signatures of agreement or disagreement with eligibility. The district's improvement plan

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is sufficient to address the area of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting. **However, the plan is insufficient to address the area of agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations because it lacks activities to address dissenting opinions. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility – During the on-site monitoring record review indicated that eligibility determination statements are included in assessment reports developed by speech and language therapists.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that speech and language providers do not include eligibility determinations in their reports since these determinations may only be made by an appropriately configured IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, goals and objectives, age of majority, annual review timelines and ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, teacher access and responsibility and observation of proposed placements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of regular education access, least restrictive environment statement and continuum. The district indicated they are not considering general education classes for every student as a first option nor does the district consistently address the first LRE statement in

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developing their IEPs. Additionally, general education early childhood placement options are not always considered. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of courses, preferences and interests, agency involvement, student agency invite.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding age fourteen transition service needs.

Area(s) of Need:

Age Fourteen Transition Service Needs – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the district is not developing transition plans for students who will turn age fourteen during the period of time that the IEP will be in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that age fourteen transition service needs are considered and documented in the IEP for those students who are or will be fourteen during the period the IEP will be in effect. Implementation of the activities will ensure appropriate transition plans are developed based on the student's interests and preferences as well as the student's strengths and are aligned to the student's post secondary outcomes.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, functional behavioral assessment,

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behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards. 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 alternative assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of approved accommodations and modifications and content knowledge. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, class size waivers, age range, age range waivers, and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of home instruction, consultation time and case management time. The district's improvement plans 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 access sheets and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access and requests, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

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 Morris School District on May 10 and 11, 2004. 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.

A review of district's data indicated that the district has a classification rate of 16.8%. They have developed improvement plan activities, including changes to its intervention and referral procedures, to address these data. Further, to address the need for improvement in the area of placement in general education settings with appropriate supports and services, the district has developed activities in the decision-making process.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents also expressed concerns with general education teachers' lack of knowledge regarding their child's IEP. Parents also felt that if they did not advocate for specific services, their children would not get them even though they were required to improve their academic skills.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent development, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, health summary, summer referrals, ID meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, IEP participants, goals and objectives, age of majority, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, individualized decision making, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation courses and preferences, agency involvement, student and agency invite, pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavior analysis, participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size, waivers, age range, waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, counseling goals and objectives transfer students, hearing aides, consent, written notices, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, written reports, acceptance and or rejection of reports, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, reevaluation for change in eligibility,

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eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, IEP participants, goals and objectives , age of majority, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, continuum, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, approved accommodations and modifications, content knowledge, home instruction, consultation time, case management time, access to student records, and documentation of other locations.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding the provision of counseling, child find, written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services and age fourteen transition service needs.

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