

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

District: Morris School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: April 26 & 27, 2004

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Jenifer Spear, Gladys Miller, Zola Mills and Carol Raff

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Morris 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 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 Morristown High School on April 21, 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 the School to Work program where students in grades 10 through 12 are placed in voluntary work situations where they experience a variety of working environments while providing service to the school and or community.

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The district is further commended for the implementation of the Comprehensive Application of Behavioral Analysis in Schooling, which is a nationally recognized program for students with Autism. The program involves teacher-training components which benefit teachers throughout the district. CABAS serves students ranging from five to eleven years of age.

The district also provides the Wilson Reading System in grades three to five. The literature-based, comprehensive reading program is available to students with special needs in these grades. Additionally, K-2 schools use Reading Recovery and Literacy Circles to address the needs of students at those grade levels.

Data Summary:

In 2002, the district's data indicated 50% of classified students are in general education settings more than 80% of the time which is above the state's average. However, the percentage of students placed in general education less than 40% of the day and in separate settings is approximately 25% which is higher than the state's average. The district identified least restrictive environment, the referral process and pre-referral interventions as factors that negatively impact the districts ability to decrease the number of students who are not currently in general education for greater periods of time and has developed an improvement plan to address the concerns in these areas. Additionally, the district identified areas of need regarding students with multiple disabilities and emotional disabilities who are heavily represented in more restrictive settings, particularly in separate facilities. The district has included activities in their improvement plan to develop programs in the district to serve students with multiple disabilities and emotional disabilities within the district.

A review of the district's classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 20% excluding speech only students. This number significantly exceeds the state's average of 13.4%. The district has submitted an improvement plan for review to address this area of concern.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need for staff development in Part I Goal I Indicator 6. **However, the district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area of need. The district will submit activities to address this area of need.**

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of related services for occupation, physical and speech therapy, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and provision of counseling services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals from parents, health summaries and identification timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from staff, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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, standardized assessments, functional assessments, signed reports and independent evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reports not being dated, bilingual evaluations and acceptance or rejection of written reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of overrepresentation of minority students in special education. **The district's improvement plan will be reviewed by members of the Office for Civil Rights as well as the NYU Equity Center and the Office of Special Education Programs.**

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and participants and re-evaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in pre-school.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of re-evaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 areas of participants at meetings, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services and signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports provided to parents ten days prior to meeting and documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding signatures of agreement or disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Agreement/Disagreement with eligibility Determinations – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that members of the eligibility team do not document their assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations.

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- The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district documents assenting and dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings, participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, IEPs provided to parents and ninety day timelines.

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 considerations of supplementary aids and services and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making process and notification and participation of out-of-district students, nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition needs, age sixteen needed transition services, student and agency invitation. 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition conference and Early Intervention to Preschool Disabled by age 3.

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 areas of manifestation determination and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment and behavior improvement plan and interim alternative education setting. 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved accommodations and modifications and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation, alternate assessments and CST knowledge of tests. 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 XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of out-of-district participation and written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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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 sizes, age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staffing. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks sufficient activities to remove the identified barriers. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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 and requests and access sheets.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Morris School District on April 26 & 27, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify all but one area 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 data indicated 50% of classified students are in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. The district has developed an improvement plan to address the concerns regarding the number of students placed in segregated settings and in self-contained classes.

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 made positive statements regarding the availability of programs for elementary level autistic students. However, they identified concerns with program options for students as they transition into secondary programs. Some parents shared concerns regarding the lack of staff knowledge pertaining to their child's disability and IEP.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of programs and related services for occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, parent referrals, health summary, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, signed written reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations for students turning age five, eligibility participants, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, teacher access and responsibility, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, preschool planning conference, early intervention plan to preschool by age three, manifestation determination, discipline procedural safeguards, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, IEP graduation requirements, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access and requests and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, extended school year, provision of related services for counseling, transfer students, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, child find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by staff, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, dated written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, overrepresentation of minorities, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to eligibility meetings, documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language, IEP

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meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goal and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, least restrictive environment decision making process, notification and participation of out of district students, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, age fourteen transition services, preferences and interests, age sixteen transition services, student and agency invitation, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, interim alternative educational setting, statewide assessment participation, alternate assessment, test knowledge, out of district participation in graduation, written notice of graduation, staffing, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other location.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services.

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.