

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

District: Mt. Laurel School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: January 22, 23, 24, 25, 2002

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Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Mt. Laurel School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. The self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Mt. Laurel 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 Mt. Laurel School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As a first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJOE held a focus group meeting on January 15, 2002. Information from the meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its continued commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities and for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs, including the provision of extensive teacher and aide training.

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The district has a six-week summer recreation program called “My Buddy and Me”, that allows classified students to invite non-classified students to participate in the program. This program continues into the school year from 4:00 to 5:30.

The district was instrumental in assisting parents in reestablishing the parent support group.

The district has an extensive staff training program called the Mt. Laurel Professional Academy. This program offers a variety of training topics to in-district and out-of-district professionals throughout the school year.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, 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/ parent development. The district developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this issue. During the on-site it was determined the district had already implemented activities to address this area of need.

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

II. Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transportation, length of school day/year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services (OT, PT, Speech and Counseling), and transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has already implemented actions that are resulting in the correction of issues regarding related services and transfer students.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and goals and objectives for speech and language.

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, it was determined that extended school year is not consistently considered for all students.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district considers and discusses extended school year services for all students. The plan must include a mechanism to document those considerations in the IEP. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Speech and Language Goals and Objectives - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that IEPs for students receiving speech as a related service did not consistently include goals and objectives. The review determined that though IEPs for students in self-contained programs included these goals, IEPs for students in resource center programs did not.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs include speech goals and objectives for students receiving speech as a related service. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, notice of a meeting and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, written notice, and native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues. During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district has implemented actions that have resulted in the correction of identified issues in the areas of timelines, written notice, and surrogate parents.

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

IV. Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, summer referrals, and timelines for identification meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting timelines for preschool students and participants at identification meetings.

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Areas of Need:

Identification Meeting Timelines for Preschool Students - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews and record reviews that identification meetings are not held within the 20-day timeline for preschool students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are held within the 20-day timeline for preschool students. The plan must also include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Participants for Preschool Students – During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews and record review that regular education teachers do not participate in the identification meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers participate in the identification meetings for preschool age students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments, written notice of speech and language evaluation plans, evaluation timelines, and documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of identified issues regarding speech and language plans.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary assessments for preschool students and written reports.

Areas of Need:

Multi-Disciplinary Assessments - During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicated that for preschool referrals, speech and language evaluations are conducted as one of the two minimum required evaluations, not as an additional assessment. As a result, the district is conducting only one of the two required child study team assessments for initial evaluations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that initial preschool evaluations include a minimum of**

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two child study team assessments. When language is a suspected area of disability, that assessment may not be considered one of the two required assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

Written Reports - During on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that evaluation reports are neither signed nor dated. In addition, speech and language evaluation reports do not consistently include a review of interventions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are signed and dated. The plan must also include procedures to ensure speech and language evaluation reports document a review of interventions attempted in the general education setting. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, and reevaluations for students 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 this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding consent for reevaluation.

Area of Need:

Consent for Reevaluation – During the on-site visit, it was determined that the form used to document parental consent for reevaluation does not meet all of the requirements because the one-page evaluation plan that requires a parent signature, does not clearly identify that the signature grants consent to the district to conduct assessments.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the request for parental consent clearly informs the parent of the action for which consent is being requested. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and criteria.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of participants and copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of issues related to the provision of evaluation reports to parents.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of eligibility.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Eligibility - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that in cases where additional assessments are not required as a part of the reevaluation process, the eligibility determination is not documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the determination of eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VIII. Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of written notice timelines, annual review timelines, and teacher access to IEP's.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, implementation dates for related services, and IEP components. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding components of IEP's, revisions to IEP's, and transfer of rights at the age of majority.

Areas of Need:

Components of IEPs - During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that the IEP for students classified as eligible for special education and related services does not indicate the duration of speech-language services. The IEP for students classified as eligible for speech-language services does not indicate strengths of the

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students, results of the most recent evaluations, and a statement of how the parent will be informed of student progress.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs contain all the required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the state's model IEPs developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Revisions to IEPs – During the on-site visit, a review of student records and interviews with staff indicated that the district does not consistently reconvene a meeting to revise the IEP. Staff members report that meetings are convened when placement changes are recommended, such as resource to self-contained, and parents are provided with written notice, including all the required components. However, if other changes are recommended, such as a change in related services or the type of resource center program, the parent is called and the issue is discussed over the phone. Subsequent to these calls, a one-page form is sent to the parent. This form does not include the components of written notice.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district convenes an IEP meeting every time a student's program and/or services is revised. Subsequent to that meeting, the parent must be provided with appropriate written notice of the proposed actions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Transfer of Rights - During the on-site visit, a review of the IEP and interviews with staff indicate that though the IEP includes a statement regarding the transfer of rights, there is no documentation in the IEP or in the file to indicate whether this statement was discussed at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at least three years prior to a student turning age 18, the students and parents are informed of the transfer of rights. The plan must include a mechanism to document that discussion. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

IX. LRE

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of regular education access and nonacademic/extracurricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these issues.

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

X. Transition- Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool by age 3.

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

X. Transition – Post-School

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study.

Area of Need:

Courses of Study - During the on-site visit, a review of the IEPs indicated that the district does not identify specific courses that students are taking.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district identifies specific courses of study that are related to the student’s post-secondary outcomes. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, interim alternative education settings, and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plans, documentation to case managers and procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the area of procedures. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address the areas of functional behavior assessments/behavior intervention plans because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. During the on-site

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visit, review of records indicated that the district has begun to implement activities to correct discipline issues.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

During the self-assessment process 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 and alternative assessment. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of identified issues.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of diplomas upon completion of the eighth grade.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of participation of students receiving educational services in out-of-district placements. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the identification of high school graduation requirements for students transitioning to the Lenape Regional High School District.

Area of Need:

IEP Requirement - During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs and interviews with staff indicated that IEPs do not include graduation requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that high school graduation requirements are documented in the IEP of each student beginning at age 14. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, group size for speech and language instruction and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of age range. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/student access, maintenance, destruction, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with regard to the procedure for accessing student records. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this issue.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Mt. Laurel School District on January 22, 23, 24, 25, 2002. 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 this review the district was able to identify many areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined compliant by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site monitoring visit.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, the fifteen parents that attended expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and identified concerns in the areas of communication with the district, academics during the summer programs, notification to parents of out-of-district students, parent involvement in the decision-making process and the need for student socialization opportunities.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment process and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, transportation, length of day/year, facilities, certification, notice of meetings, independent evaluations, parent referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, participants at planning meetings, turning age five, eligibility meetings and criteria, written notice, annual review timelines, teacher knowledge and access of IEP, individualized decision making, Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplementary aides and services, preschool transition, post-school transition, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings, approved statewide assessments and documentation, discipline, graduation requirements, programs and services and student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent training, related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, written notice, native language, Child Find, summer referrals, Identification meetings, functional assessments, written reports including acceptance and rejection and copies to parents, reevaluation timelines, eligibility participants, IEP implementation dates, participants, considerations and required statements, regular education access, non-academic/extra curricular activities, functional behavior assessments/behavior intervention programs, discipline, documentation to case manager, alternate assessment, age range, and access to records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, consent, participants at identification and planning meetings, timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, written reports, documentation of eligibility, goals and objectives for speech, consent for reevaluation, post school transition courses, transfer of rights, graduation requirements, and IEP requirements and revisions.

Within forty five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Education Programs to address the areas

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of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.