

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Neptune City School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: January 6, 2004

Monitoring Team: Michelle Davis-Young, Vanessa Leonard and Barbara Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Neptune City School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Neptune City 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 Neptune City 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 Woodrow Wilson School on September 25, 2003. 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its **Homework Center** program. This program allows all students to complete homework or incomplete class work assignments under the supervision and with the assistance of one of the district’s certified teachers.

The district is also commended for the **Book Buddies Club** in which students in grades four through eight volunteer their time to help students in kindergarten through third

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

grade develop their reading skills through oral reading practice with his or her upper grade "book buddy."

The district is further commended for its **Creative Writing Club** that provides all students with an outlet for expressing their thoughts and feelings in a nonacademic environment. One focus of this club is to promote the use of various forms of writing and for students to develop portfolios of their work. Additionally, students are encouraged to write everyday and utilize the club meetings to share their works and assist each other with developing creative ideas and interesting writing projects. Students also submit many of these writings to the school's writing/literary booklet "The Pirate Spirit" and participate in the selection of creative writing contributions from other students.

Data Summary:

The Neptune City School District is commended for increasing the percentage of preschool students being educated in general education settings by almost 9% over the past four years. The data provided by the district indicate that between the 2000 and 2002 school years the district increased the percentage of students in general education for more than 80% of the school day by 4%. Additionally, the district's current expansion of its in-class support program indicates a continuation in this positive direction. Finally, the data show that the district's classification rate is comparable with the state's average of 14.3%.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were determined to be areas 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 and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of in-services training for professional and paraprofessional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 programs and related services, length of school day/year, transfer student procedures and certifications.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of adaptive physical education and measurable goals and objectives for special education programs and 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 visit regarding facilities. **The Monmouth County Office of Education has been advised of the concerns regarding the facilities at the Woodrow Wilson School.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings and written notice, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notices in native language. 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 the content and provision of notice of meetings for students eligible for speech/ language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a Meeting - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through parent and staff interviews and record review that parents are not consistently provided with notice of meetings for students eligible for speech/language services in a timely manner because the speech therapist was unaware that the provision of such notices prior to an IEP meeting was a code requirement. Additionally, these notices of meetings do not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise its notices of meetings to include all of the required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the forms developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Additionally the district will revise the improvement plan to ensure the provision of the revised notices of meetings in a timely manner. The implementation of this activity will ensure that parents are provided with the opportunity to fully participate in the decision-making process during all required IEP meetings for students eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activity.**

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of child find activities and pre-referral interventions. Although the district initially identified this as an area on need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area. The district also identified a concern in the area of audiometric/vision screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance/rejection of evaluation reports. Although the district initially identified this as an area on need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area. The district also identified a concern in the area of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services. 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 VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting/participants, criteria and statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of signature of agreement/disagreement with a rationale. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area. The district also identified concerns in the areas of referrals of students eligible for speech/language services to the child study team for evaluation when other disabilities

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

are suspected and copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to IEP meetings. 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 VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings/participants, considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for special education and related services, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEPs to parents, teacher responsibility, statements of Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) and considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for speech/language services. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision-making process, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access for in-district students and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 statement of Transition Services Needs, preferences/interests survey/assessment and agency invitation.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

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

No 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 documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of manifestation determination meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of case management responsibility. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access, requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of other locations of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Neptune City School District on January 6, 2003. 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 Neptune City School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of the improvement plan activities to address many of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. The district is also commended for the many areas that were 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 data indicated that the district's classification rate is comparable with the state's average. The data also indicated that the district has increased the percentage of preschool-aged students being educated in the general education setting by 9% and school aged students being educated in the general education setting by 4%. Additionally, the district was able to demonstrate that it is taking steps to develop programs which should continue to ensure that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment.

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were areas determined to be compliant with all of the standards.

A focus group meeting held on September 25, 2003 was attended by approximately 15 parents, teachers, child study team members and administrators. Many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and reported that through special services, their children had experienced "dramatic improvements" academically. A parent expressed concern that the school building was not handicapped accessible. Another parent stated that parents are not always provided with notice in sufficient time to attend IEP meeting and are not always offered PRISE. Additionally, parents feel that the district's current process for transition planning for 8th grade students transferring to a neighboring district for high school is problematic and offers little guidance for the students and/or parents. Parents further maintained that they do have a positive working relationship with the child study team members and are involved in the decision-making process. Furthermore, phone calls to 10-15 additional parents during the on-site visit also yielded positive comments regarding the quality of the district's special education programs and parental involvement in the IEP process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, of extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day/year, transfer student procedures, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings and written notice, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals from parents/staff, health summaries, identification meeting timelines/participants, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meeting/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, IEP meetings/participants, considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for special education

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

and related services, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access, decision-making process, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access for in-district students, continuum of programs, statement of Transition Services Needs, preferences/interests survey/assessment, agency invitation, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention program to preschool disabilities program by age three, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access/requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-services training for professional and paraprofessional staff, adaptive physical education, measurable goals and objectives for special education programs and services, notices in native language, pre-referral interventions, audiometric and vision screenings, child find activities, acceptance/rejection of evaluation reports, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, signature of agreement/disagreement with a rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to IEP meetings, referrals of students eligible for speech/language services to child study team for evaluation when other disabilities are suspected, IEPs to parents, teacher responsibility, considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for speech/language services, statements of Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs), notification/participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities, student invitation, manifestation determination meetings, case management responsibility and documentation of other locations of records.

The on-site visit identified one additional area of need regarding the content and provision of notices of meetings for students eligible for speech language services.

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