

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

**District:** Netcong School District

**County:** Morris

**Monitoring Dates:** December 17,18, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** Zola Mills, Thomas Walsh, Jennifer DeSaye

**Background Information:**

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Netcong School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Netcong 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 Netcong 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 the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on December 10, 2001 at the Netcong Elementary School. Information obtained from that 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 the Peer-to-Peer Program. This program provides mentoring by older students for the fifth grade students who are entering the departmentalized program. The district is also to be commended for joint programs with a neighboring district to enlarge the extracurricular offerings to students. These programs include a Ski Club and intramural athletics. The district also participates in a joint academic program to provide students with the opportunity to

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

participate in an Algebra class with a neighboring district. A summer reading program is also offered to all students.

**Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**General Provisions and Discipline** 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 II: FAPE**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with the provision of the related service of counseling. The district has hired additional personnel to provide counseling services. However, because these staff members have no experience as team members, the improvement plan needs to be revised to include a staff development component as well as a mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of the training.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding extended school year (ESY).

**Areas of Need:**

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site visit it was determined that although the child study team has developed and incorporated into their handbook the appropriate procedures and criteria for determining the need for an ESY, these services are only provided to some preschoolers.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that ESY services are considered for all students and provided when determined appropriate. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure team members apply a regression/recoupment formula to assist them in determining the need for an ESY program. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with these procedures.**

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

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

### **Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with surrogate parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district also identified a concern with the content of the notice of a meeting for transition. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding notices of meetings and written notice.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Notice of a Meeting** – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review that although parent participation at meetings was very good, the district does not document the provision of notice of meetings in the student record.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it maintains documentation of the provision of notice of a meeting in the student record.**

**Notices** - During the on-site visit it was determined the district's notices do not contained all of the required components. It was further identified through the interview process and through record review that team members did not understand the purposes and required actions for the various meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure team members conduct meetings in a manner that leads to appropriate actions and/or outcomes as identified in notices of a meeting. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure prior written notices resulting from these meetings contain all required components. The plan must further include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with these procedures.**

### **Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification**

## New Jersey State Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of health summary, vision/hearing screenings for students eligible for speech services and identification meeting timelines/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns with Child Find activities, individual determinations at the identification meeting, and issues related to the nature and scope of evaluations. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district must revise its improvement plan to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visits regarding the referral process, health summaries, and vision/hearing screenings for students eligible for special education and related services.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Referral Process** – During the on-site visit, it was determined the district does not have a process that affords teachers the opportunity to make a direct referral to the CST. All teacher referrals are required to go through the Intervention and Referral Services Committee. It was further identified that because there is no written procedure in either the parent or staff handbook regarding the direct referral process, parents are unaware that they have that right.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that staff and parents have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the I&RS committee. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must include staff development and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with the full implementation of these activities.**

**Health Summaries and Vision/Hearing Screenings** - During the on-site visit it was determined the district does not conduct hearing and vision screenings for all students referred for evaluation and does not summarize existing health information prior to the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that health summaries and vision/hearing screenings are conducted by the school nurse and documented in the student file for each student referred for an**

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

**initial evaluation. The plan should include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with these procedures.**

**Identification Meeting** - Although meetings are conducted, the district does not maintained documentation of these activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it maintains documentation that identification meetings are conducted.**

**Section V: Evaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with multi-disciplinary assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding required components of written reports, and documentation of acceptance/rejection of outside reports. The district has developed a plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. Furthermore, the district must revise the form it developed as part of its original improvement plan to address acceptance/rejection of outside reports because it fails to adequately correct this area of need.

No additional areas of need where found during the on-site monitoring.

**Section VI. Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants, and reevaluation timelines. In the area of reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of the students last year in pre-school the district identified themselves as compliant, however, no records were available for review.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding written notice of reevaluation planning meetings.

**Areas of Need:**

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

**Planning Meetings** – During the on-site visit it was determined that although the district provides written notice subsequent to the reevaluation planning meeting, they do not maintain documentation of this provision.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it documents the provision of written notice subsequent to the reevaluation planning meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure compliance with these procedures.**

**Section VII. Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings/participants and the provision of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with eligibility criteria and the statement of eligibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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

**Section VIII: Individualized Education Program**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP implementation dates and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with meeting participants, provision of the IEP to parents, teacher access/knowledge of IEPs, and annual review timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of needs. The district also identified concerns regarding documentation of considerations/required statements, and the PLEP statement. The district's plan is insufficient to address these needs because it lacks an in-service training component and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The plan needs to be revised to include these components. Additionally, the district identified concerns regarding opportunities to observe proposed educational placements and alignment of the goals/objectives to the core curriculum content standards. The district's plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and in-service training for CST members and administrative staff to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding revisions to the IEP.

**Areas of Need:**

**Revisions to IEPs** – During the on-site visit it was determined IEPs are being revised with the knowledge and verbal consent of parents, but without benefit of an IEP meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEP meetings are conducted and written notice is provided prior to changing a student’s program or services. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

**Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the individualized decision-making process, supplementary aids and services, and LRE considerations and required statements. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of needs. The district further identified concerns regarding the need for notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic/extracurricular activities within the district. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this issue. The district needs to revise their improvement plan to include procedures, training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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

**Section X: Transition from School to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with student/agency invitations, student’s preferences and interests, courses of study and desired post-school outcomes. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Section X: Transition from Preschool**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with pre-school transition planning conferences. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure procedures are fully implemented to bring about required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include this component.

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

**Section XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved accommodations/modifications and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with use of appropriate criteria to determine participation in statewide assessments, alternate assessments, and team members having knowledge about the content of statewide assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. It is recommended that each child study team member receive a copy of "The Directory of Test Specifications" (DTS) for each content area and/or the sample form of the ESPA and GEPA.

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

**Section XIII: Graduation**

Graduation requirements are not applicable in this kindergarten through eighth grade district.

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class/group size and age range.



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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with employment of child study team personnel and other school staff in sufficient numbers to provide required services, a description of special class programs and home instruction. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of needs.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding common planning time.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Common Planning Time** - During the on-site visit it was determined through the interview process and record review that teachers do not have common planning time.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure special education teachers have common planning time with general education teachers. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section XV: Student Records**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of access to student records and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the maintenance/destruction of student records and staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of the procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include this component.

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

## **SUMMARY**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Netcong School District on December 17-18, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive

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

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 revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The district had already identified during the self-assessment process many of the concerns that were raised by the parents at the focus group meeting. An additional concern was expressed regarding the in-class support model used by the district.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, goals/objectives for related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, written notices in native language, independent evaluations, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings for students eligible for speech services, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines/participants, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meetings/participants, provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP implementation dates, 90-day timelines, regular education access, transition from Early Intervention Program to preschool by age three, discipline procedures, accommodations/modifications for statewide assessments, class/group size in special education and speech-language therapy, age range, access sheets, and access to student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of appropriate related services, procedures for selection of surrogate parents, notice of meeting for transition, referral process and pre-referral interventions, Child Find activities, nature/scope of evaluations, multidisciplinary assessments, written reports, acceptance/rejection of reports, eligibility criteria/statement, IEP meeting participants, IEP considerations and required statements, alignment of goals and objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, teacher IEP access/responsibility, IEP to parents, PLEP statements, individualized decision-making, LRE considerations, supplementary aids/services, nonacademic/extracurricular participation of out-of-district students, preschool transition conferences, post-school outcomes, agency invitation/involvement, student invitation to transition meetings, participation in statewide assessment or alternate assessments, child study team knowledge of content of statewide assessments, staffing, description of programs, home instruction, staff knowledge of student records policy and procedures and maintenance/destruction of student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding counseling as a related service, extended school year, notices of meetings, written notice, referral process, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting, documentation of acceptance/rejection of outside reports, reevaluation meetings, alignment of goals and objectives with core curriculum content standards, progress reports to parents, and common planning time.

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

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.