

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

District: New Hanover Township School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: March 10 and 11, 2003

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the New Hanover Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the New Hanover Township 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 New Hanover Township 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 New Hanover Township Elementary School on March 3, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides a computerized distance learning program for all students in the areas of Science and Social Studies. This program allows the district to share instruction and information with neighboring school districts as well as connect with educational programs on a nationwide basis.

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The district has implemented Successmaker for all students, which is an interactive practice and assessment computerized math program for the elementary grades. This program addresses computation and application skills covering a wide range of learning objectives.

The district has provided a seven-week evening parenting program entitled "Strengthening Families." The program is funded through a grant opportunity and provides support in parenting strategies.

The district also provides several other innovative programs including a school-wide theater program and an after-school mentoring program called Blues Buddies, which is operated in cooperation with the municipal alliance and the local police department.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Discipline was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff development, parent training, and policies and procedures, specifically the need to develop a district special education procedural manual. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 OT and PT, transfer procedures, length of school day/year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of counseling as a related service. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the area of oversight of implementation and provision of IEP services, specifically related services. Although the improvement plan does not include procedures for oversight, the district has an appropriate mechanism in place that includes a review of related services logs by the coordinator. In addition, the district identified a need to provide additional speech-language services. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in this area.

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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 notice of a meeting, consent, written notice, and surrogate parents. On-site monitoring activities indicate that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of meetings, native language and independent evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of N.J.A.C. 6A: 14, 1:6A, and PRISE.

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Code Documents – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with staff members and a review of pupil records indicated the district does not provide N.J.A.C. 1:6A as required. In addition, although the district provides N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and PRISE, the documents are not the most current version.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of N.J.A.C. 1:6A and the current version of N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and PRISE. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, including the need for a pupil assistance committee and a mechanism for implementing and documenting pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of Child Find and an overrepresentation of minority students in special education. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summaries and vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, and procedures for language referrals.

Area(s) of Need:

Health Summaries and Vision/Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of pupil records indicated that health summaries and vision/hearing screening information are not consistently reviewed at the identification meeting because current district procedures do not ensure that this information is provided to the child study team prior to the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that health summaries and vision/hearing screenings are conducted for all students referred for an evaluation and that the information is provided to the child study team prior to the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of pupil records indicated that the full child study team is not consistently in attendance at the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the full child study team is in attendance at identification meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Language Referrals – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of pupil records indicated that when a student is referred for a speech-language evaluation and language issues are identified prior to the determination of eligibility, although a referral is made to the child study team, the process of determining eligibility for speech-language services continues and services are provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the speech therapist(s) immediately refers a student to the child study team in the event a language-based disability is identified during the course of an evaluation to determine eligibility for speech-language services. The plan must further ensure the speech therapist(s) discontinues the process prior to determining eligibility. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 assessments, use of standardized assessments, components of functional assessments, and written reports.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance/rejection of reports. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding bilingual evaluations. Although the district's improvement plan does not include an oversight component for this activity, the district has an appropriate mechanism in place that includes an evaluation tracking system that is regularly reviewed by the coordinator.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation planning meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines, conducting reevaluations sooner than three years, proceeding without undue delay once consent has been obtained, and documentation of planning meeting decisions. Although the district's improvement plan does not include an administrative oversight component, a mechanism is in place that includes a computerized tracking system, a tracking sheet for each pupil's folder, and a review of planning meeting data by the coordinator. The district further identified concerns regarding reevaluation of preschool students prior to June 30th. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in 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 area of documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of eligibility criteria based on required assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants and provision of evaluation reports to parents. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding classification for students eligible for speech-language services and the certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

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Area(s) of Need:

Classification of Students Eligible for Speech-Language Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of student records determined that students who are determined eligible for speech-language services are classified eligible for special education and related services instead of eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students who are eligible for speech and language services, only are classified under that category. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of pupil records indicated that eligibility team members are not documenting their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations when a student is determined not eligible for services. Instead, it is only provided if a student is determined eligible and an IEP is developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure eligibility team members document their agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations for every student, even when a student is determined not eligible for services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of age of majority and procedures for revising IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings and meeting participants, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, implementation dates, teacher access to IEPs, annual review timelines, and IEP components. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of IEP goals and objectives. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure that goals and objectives reflect the needs of the students.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of Oberti considerations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, consideration and documentation of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, and continuum of services for both preschool and school-aged students. Interviews with staff during the on-site visit indicated that barriers to compliance include staffing needs and fiscal constraints. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students in out-of-district placements. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because the timelines identified for completion of the activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates.**

No additional areas of need were 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 student and agency invitations, statements of transition service needs, statements of needed transition services, documentation of student interests and preferences, and consideration of those interests and preferences when the student does not attend the meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures to ensure that these transition planning activities are conducted for students who will be turning fourteen during the period of time the IEP will be in place and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 implementation of IEPs by age three.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation and provision of IEP modifications and accommodations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of participation in the alternate proficiency assessment. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks procedures to ensure that the criteria for exemptions are appropriately applied when considering whether students will participate in the alternate proficiency assessment. In addition, the plan lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in graduation exercises for students placed in out-of-district programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 and age range, group size for speech therapy, and homebound instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staffing needs, provision of team teaching and supplemental instruction programs, and common planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of descriptions of special class programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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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 procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of access to pupil records and parent/adult access to student records. On-site monitoring activities indicated that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of other locations of pupil records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the New Hanover Township School District on March 10 and 11, 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 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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.

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 and staff members indicated that many of the problems that existed in the past have improved in the last year. They expressed satisfaction with the direction the district is taking in addressing issues of noncompliance. Some concerns were expressed regarding the need for more parent workshops and the budgetary and staffing constraints that restrict the provision of some programs and services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of related services other than counseling, length of school day/year, transfer procedures, facilities, certification, direct and summer referrals, identification meeting timelines, use of multidisciplinary and standardized assessments, components of functional assessments, written reports, reevaluation planning meetings, eligibility documentation, age of majority, preschool transition, procedures for discipline, IEP requirements for graduation, class/group size, age range, homebound instruction, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding special education policies and procedures, staff and parent development, provision of counseling and speech services, oversight of IEP implementation, notice of a meeting, surrogate parents, meetings, consent, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral intervention strategies, Child Find activities, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluations for preschool students, documentation of reevaluation planning decisions, eligibility meetings, eligibility criteria, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP implementation dates, IEP meeting participants, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, teacher access to IEPs, 90-day timelines, IEP components, goals and objectives, individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, continuum of services for preschool and school-aged students, transition to post-school activities, statewide assessment, participation in graduation exercises, staffing needs and provision of team teaching and supplemental instruction, common planning time for teachers, records of access to pupil files, and procedures for providing parent/adult student access to records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding provision of required code documents, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, procedures for language referrals, determination of eligibility for speech-language services, agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations, and documentation of locations of other pupil records.

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