

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

District: North Arlington School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: October 22, 2004

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2002– 2003 school year, the **North Arlington School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the North Arlington School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 North Arlington 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 Washington Elementary School on October 13, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the support that general education secondary students provide to students who participate in the New Jersey Special Olympics winter ski finals. This program is run by both general education and special education staff. Volunteer students assist the Olympians in activities both on and off the slopes.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district supports transition to adult life beginning at the middle school level with a life skills program which meets weekly at each grade level. Topics include decision making and career planning. A career awareness course is offered to all ninth graders. The five credit course is a continuation of the middle school program. Additionally, an optional work based learning program is offered to students with disabilities at the secondary level. Students learn about a variety of careers by working in the community.

Data Summary:

The North Arlington school district's classification rate of 16.9% (excluding student's eligible for speech and language services) for the 2002-2003 school year exceeded the state average of 14.3% for that year. The district has indicated in the self-assessment the need to revise the pre-referral process in an effort to decrease the classification rate. The district will also monitor classification data annually and train staff on eligibility criteria.

During the 2002 – 2003 school year 50% of students with disabilities ages 6-21 were placed in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. This number is higher than the state average of 41.6%. The district places 57.1% of their preschool students with disabilities in early childhood special education programs. Although this is comparable to the state average, the district identified the need to develop general education options for students with disabilities at preschool, elementary, middle and high school levels.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation Requirements 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 compliance in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, length of day and year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students, hearing aids, out of district participation and transition services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the frequency of counseling services.

Frequency of Counseling Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the frequency of counseling services is indicated in IEPs on the as needed basis.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs specifically identify the frequency in which counseling services will be provided. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff know the frequency of the services the student will receive in order to derive educational benefit from these services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and provision of written notices. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, direct referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

Child Find – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that the district's Child Find activities only include ages 3-5.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to expand their child activities to include children ages 6-21. Implementation of these activities will ensure that efforts are being made to locate, refer and identify students ages 3-21 who are potentially disabled. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written reports for students eligible for speech and language services and acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the dating of written reports for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that speech and language reports were not consistently dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that speech and language evaluation reports are dated. Implementation of these activities will ensure staff and parents are aware of the assessment date and the date the report was developed.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and reevaluation completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding planning meeting participants.

Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, interview and record review indicated that general education teachers are inconsistently in attendance at eligibility, IEP and reevaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure all required participants attend meetings. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the roles of the participants at meetings are clearly identified in the documentation of participation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, implementation of the activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of eligibility meetings, criteria and statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of signatures of agreement and disagreement and copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants which is discussed in Section VI.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, considerations and required statements for students eligible for special education and related services, present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants for related service providers, related service provider's written reports documenting eligibility, IEP implementation, behavioral intervention plans, consideration and required statements for students eligible for speech and language services, case management, consultative time and teacher responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP meeting participants which is discussed in Section VI.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, documentation of least restrictive environment, consideration of supplementary aides and services and nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of regular education access and continuum of programs. The district's improvement is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified out of district participation in Section II. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area as well.

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

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 compliance in the areas of student and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests and age 16 transition service needs. These areas of need were identified in Section II. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 compliance in the areas of transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to preschool by age three.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified behavioral intervention plans in Section II and the district's improvement is sufficient to this area as well.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications and alternate proficiency assessments.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of knowledge of the content of the Core Curriculum Content Standards. 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 compliance in the areas of class size and waivers and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time in Section VIII. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding group sizes for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Group Sizes – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and observation that three self-contained classes meet together once a week for group speech therapy. The group is led by one speech and language specialist and assisted by classroom teachers and support staff and counted as a speech session for all students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that group sizes for speech and language services do not exceed five. Although a group session may be conducted within a lesson in the classroom, the session cannot be considered a speech session for more than 5 students at a time and must be focused on the individualized goals and objectives of those students. The implementation of these activities will ensure that the student's individualized needs are met. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access and requests. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 North Arlington School District on October 22 & 25, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify 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 many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data submitted by the district indicated that the district had a classification rate of 16.9% during the 2002-2003 which exceeded the state average of 14.3%. The district's improvement plan includes activities to attempt to decrease the classification rate. Additionally, during the 2002 – 2003 school year 50% of classified students ages 6-21 were placed in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. This number is higher than the state average of 41.6%. The district has self-identified the need to develop preschool options for age 3 preschool students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The district further identified the need to develop general education options for students with disabilities at all grade levels.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A few parents shared concerns with the level of transition services for students at the secondary level. Additionally, parents noted that they are involved in the IEP process and would like to be made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the focus meeting, additional parent interviews and the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, notices of meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, present levels of educational performance, considerations and required statements for students eligible for special education and related services, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, student and agency invitation, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational settings, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, IEP requirements, out of district participation in graduation, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, age range waivers, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of other location.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, transfer students, hearing aides, out of district participation, surrogate parents, written notices, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision & hearing screenings, written reports for students eligible for speech and language services, acceptance and rejection of reports, agreement or disagreement rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents, considerations and required statements for students eligible for speech and language services, written reports of related service providers, IEP implementation, case management and consultative time, regular education access, notification and participation of out of district students, continuum of programs, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, discipline documentation to case manager, behavioral intervention plans, statewide assessment content knowledge and knowledge of student records procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding frequency of counseling services, child find, written reports for students eligible for speech and language services, planning meeting participants, eligibility meeting participants, IEP meeting participants and group sizes.

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