

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: North Plainfield Borough School District

County: Somerset

Monitoring Dates: October 15, 2002

Monitoring Team: Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Stephen Coplin, Debbie Masarsky, Barbara Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the North Plainfield Borough 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 Plainfield 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 North Plainfield Borough 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 North Plainfield Borough School District on October 10, 2002. 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 is commended for offering a transition course entitled **Practical Planning** to students in grades 9 -12. The objective of the course is to assist students in identifying and addressing their post-school transition needs and to provide an opportunity for teachers to be more involved in the "School-to-Work" needs of students. High school

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

special education students are also offered the opportunity to participate in **SAM (Student Advocates for the Millennium)**. This transition program encourages students to attend State sponsored workshops and presentations in an effort to increase their knowledge and awareness regarding self-advocacy skills.

The district provides an opportunity for special education students to be paired with a mentor teacher in the **Mentoring and ASK (After School Kids) Program**. Pre-school disabled students are paired with high school students from the Child Development class who serve as mentors for various building level activities.

Additionally, the district offers all students the unique opportunity to sit as a representative of the student body on the North Plainfield Board of Education.

A **Parent Information Group** has been formed in the district to offer parents of special education students the opportunity to meet and share current information on various topics.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding policies/procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding professional, para-professional and parent training/workshops. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 regarding documentation of location of related services, length of school day/year and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding transfer student procedures, certification of staff and hearing aids worn by students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding the provision of programs/related services as required by IEPs, extended school year and goals/objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of frequency/duration of related services and provision of counseling services.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Frequency/Duration of Related Services - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that the frequency and the duration of related services are inconsistently documented in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the frequency/duration of related services in IEPs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Provision of Counseling Services - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that the district has not provided counseling since September 2002 as required by IEPs because the counselor assigned to provide services has been on medical leave.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides counseling as required by IEPs. The improvement plan must include compensatory services for those services not provided during this school year as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding consent, notice of meetings, content of written notice and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding selection and training of surrogate parents, written notice in the native language of the parent, documentation of attempts to communicate with parents whose language is unwritten and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of prior written notice. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an appropriate procedure, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**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 regarding direct referrals and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find, identification meeting timelines, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, referral procedures, pre-referral interventions and documentation of the effectiveness of interventions prior to referral. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding an existing backlog of students waiting to be referred. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedure, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 regarding multidisciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for students eligible for special education/related services, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns regarding written reports for students eligible for speech/language services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a procedure to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding reevaluation planning meetings, participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding 3-year reevaluation timelines.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

3-year Reevaluation Timelines - During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district does not complete reevaluations within the required timelines.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts reevaluations every three years or sooner if conditions warrant. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding eligibility meeting/participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents/adult students ten days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern regarding eligibility criteria. The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this element. Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding the development of a statistical formula for specific learning disability (SLD). The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding IEP meetings, present levels of educational performance statement (PLEPs), annual reviews for students eligible for special education/related services, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP considerations/required statements, goals/objectives, IEPs in effect at the beginning of the school year, delay in implementing IEPs, documentation of implementation dates, provision of IEPs to parents/adult students and teacher access/responsibility regarding content and implementation of students' IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding meeting participants and the reconvening of IEP meetings when appropriate decision-makers are not in attendance. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this element.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language services and age of majority.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Reviews for Student Eligible for Speech/Language Services - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review that annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language are not completed within the required timeline.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district completes annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language in a timely manner. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Age of Majority - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that beginning at age 15, the district does not inform parents/students of the transfer of rights.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district informs parents/students that the transfer of rights will occur when the student reaches the age of majority. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding notification of non-academic/extra-curricular activities to students in out-of-district placements. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include this element. The district further identified a concern regarding regular education access for pre-school students with disabilities. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. Additionally, the district identified concerns regarding individualized decision-making, supplementary aids/services and the continuum of program options in the district. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding student preferences/interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student/agency invitation to the transition meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding transition planning/statements.

Area(s) of Need:

Transition Planning/Statements - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that the district does not consistently discuss transition at meetings for eighth grade students who will turn 14 during the period of time that IEP is in place. In addition, the transition section of in-district/out-of-district IEPs does not contain the required components to appropriately document the transition planning process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district discusses/documents transition planning for those eighth grade students who will turn 14 while that IEP is in place. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding attendance at preschool transition planning conferences. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district further identified concerns regarding early intervention to a preschool disabilities program by age 3. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding 45-day return, procedural safeguards and behavioral intervention plans.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding discipline procedures, documentation of suspension to case managers, short-term removals, functional behavioral assessments/manifestation determinations, Interim alternative educational settings and due process procedures. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedure, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding suspension tracking.

Area(s) of Need:

Suspension Tracking – During the on-site visit, it was determined that although the district's database can be used to track suspensions, the district does not currently use this data-base or any other system to track the removal of classified students from program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district tracks the number of days that special education students are removed from program. The improvement plan must include in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding IEP documentation, accommodations/modifications and the special review assessment process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff knowledge of content of assessments and criteria for determining participation in the assessment process or the alternate proficiency assessment. 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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding notification to students in out-of-district placements of participation in graduation exercises and activities.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP documentation of graduation requirements beginning at age 14, rationale for exemption from passing the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) and Written Notice of Graduation to students in out-of-district placements.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Graduation Requirements – During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that the district does not include graduation requirements in IEPs for those 14 year old students who are transitioning into high school.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district appropriately completes the graduation requirements for students beginning at age 14 who are transitioning into high school. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Rationale for Exemption from Passing the HSPA – During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that when a student is exempt from passing the HSPA, the rationale for this exemption is not consistently documented in the graduation requirements section of the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents a rationale for exemption when a student is not required to pass the HSPA as a graduation requirement. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice of Graduation for Students In Out-of-District Placements – During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that although Written Notice of Graduation is provided to students who attend in-district programs, students in out-of-district placements are not provided with this notice.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides Written Notice of Graduation to students placed in out-of-district programs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding age range, group sizes for speech therapy and approval for home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding consultation time for teachers and special class programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding insufficient numbers of staff to provide programs and related services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks appropriate procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. Additionally, the district identified concerns regarding program changes without convening IEP meetings, team teaching, supplementary instruction, instructional group sizes that exceed code limits and provision of home instruction. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 regarding student record access/requests, access sheets and maintenance of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding destruction of student records. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Student Records In Other Locations – During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other records maintained by the district in the central file.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the location of other records maintained by the district in the central file.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the North Plainfield Borough School District on October 15, 2002. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined 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, approximately 30 parents expressed their views about the provision of programs and services administered by the North Plainfield Borough School District. Systemic issues and concerns raised by parents in attendance were of a similar nature to those identified in the district's self-assessment document. These areas included the number of teachers employed on emergency certifications, workshops/trainings for staff/para-professionals/parents, the referral process, Child Find, implementation of IEPs, extended school year, transition planning and the continuum of options within the district. Parents expressed positive comments regarding accessibility to the director and the supervisor, the provision of specialized reading programs such as Wilson, Stevenson and Project Read.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, documentation of location of related services, length of day/year, facilities, consent, notice of meetings, content of written notice, independent evaluations, direct referrals, identification meeting/participants, multidisciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for students eligible for special education/related services, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meeting/participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting/participants, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility, convening IEP meetings, present levels of educational performance statements (PLEPs), 90-day timeline, annual reviews for students eligible for special education/related services, student interests/preference assessment, 45-day return, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, behavioral intervention plans, statewide assessment documentation, accommodations/modifications, special review assessment process, notification to students out-of-district regarding graduation exercises/activities, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, approval for home instruction, student record access/requests, access sheets and maintenance of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies/procedures, professional/para-professional/parent trainings, provision of programs/related services as indicated in IEPs, goal/objectives for related services, transfer procedures, certification of staff, hearing aids worn by students, extended school year, selection/training of surrogate parents, provision of written notice, written notice in the native language of the parent, documentation of attempts to communicate with parents whose language is unwritten, interpreters, Child Find activities, identification meeting/timelines, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, referral procedures/pre-referral interventions, documentation of effectiveness of interventions, existing backlog

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

of students waiting to be referred, multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, written reports for students eligible for speech/language services, provision of reports to parents/adult students, eligibility criteria, statistical formula for specific learning disability, IEP considerations/required statements, modifications/supports, meeting participants/reconvening meetings, IEP goals/objectives, IEPs in effect at the beginning of the school year, delay in implementing IEPs, documentation of implementation dates, provision of IEPs to parents/adult students, teacher access/responsibility regarding implementation of the IEP, notification/participation for students in non-academic/extra-curricular activities, regular education access for preschoolers, individualized decision-making process, supplementary aids and services, continuum of program options, student/agency invitation, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention to a preschool disabilities program by age 3, discipline procedures, documentation of suspension to case managers, short-term removals, functional behavioral assessments/manifestation determinations, Interim alternative educational settings- lists, due process procedures, staff knowledge of content of SWA, participation in statewide assessment/alternate proficiency assessment, consultation time for teachers, special class program descriptions, personnel insufficient in numbers for the provision of programs/related services, resource programs, teaching teams, supplementary instruction, provision of home instruction, instructional group sizes, and destruction of student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding documentation of frequency/duration of related services, provision of counseling services, 3-year reevaluation timelines, annual reviews for students eligible for speech/language services, age of majority, transition planning/statements, suspension tracking, documentation of graduation requirements, rationale for exemption from passing the HSPA, Written Notice of Graduation for students in out-of-district placements and documentation of student records in other locations.

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