

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: North Wildwood City School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: November 16, 2004

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the North Wildwood City School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the North Wildwood City 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 Wildwood City School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the Margaret Mace School on November 16, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to assist in 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 director.

District Strengths:

Assistive technology such as the Alpha Smart, Co-writer, and Phonic Ear are available for students with disabilities. Sound field auditory systems are operating in all special class programs. Additionally, the district is annually adding sound-field systems to general education classrooms with the goal of installing a system in all primary classrooms.

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The district hosts the Homework Club, in which students with disabilities and students who need remediation are offered after-school academic assistance. The Homework Hotline, the breakfast program, peer mediation, and peer leadership are additional supports offered by the district.

The district has implemented the Mentor-Buddy Program, which provides support for at-risk students. In this program, students are matched with staff members and participate in various community service and leisure activities. Adopt-A-Street and the Backpack Project are two of the many activities in which mentor-buddies participate.

Data Summary:

The North Wildwood City School District reported a classification rate of 22.8% (85 of 381 students) for the 2003-2004 school year which is above the state average of 16.3%. In December 2004, however, the district reported a drop in students receiving special education to 18.74% (67 of 360 students). It is also important to note that 14 of the 67 students receive only speech-language services. The district provides a full continuum of services and has only 8 classified students placed in out-of-district settings, at 9.8%, which is a decrease from 2002, when 18.2% of students were placed in out-of-district settings.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation, Eligibility, IEP, LRE, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

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

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 provision of programs, related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, and certifications.

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

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, the referral process, prereferral interventions, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

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

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

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three-year timelines, planning meetings, notices, participants at the planning meetings, parental consent, and meetings for students turning age five.

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

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the North Wildwood City School District on November 16, 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 this review the district was able to identify 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 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 monitoring visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated the district has decreased the number of students in out-of-district settings, has a continuum of programs and services offered in the district, and continues to provide instruction in the general education setting as much as possible.

At a focus group meeting held following the monitoring visit, parents and a teacher expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. No concerns were raised regarding any issues relative to special education. Parents reported that they were satisfied with the academic content and level of curricula for their children, stating that they have witnessed improvements in their children's performance and skills.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation, Eligibility, IEP, LRE, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, and Student Records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of programs, related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, certifications, child find, referral process, prereferral interventions, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, notices, participants at reevaluation planning meetings, and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, extended school year, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and change in eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services.

The on-site visit identified no additional areas of need.

No revisions to the district's improvement plan are required. The plan as submitted in June, 2004 will be reviewed for approval by the Office of Special Education Programs

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and the County Superintendent. The County Office of Education will oversee implementation of the improvement plan.