

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

District: Northern Valley Regional High HS- Demarest **County:** Bergen

Monitoring Dates: November 22, 2004

Monitor: Susan Wilson & Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, **Northern Valley Regional High School** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Northern Valley Regional High School** with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The **Northern Valley Regional High School** developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

As the first step to verifying the self-assessment findings, to assessing the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at Northern Valley Regional High School - Demarest on the evening of November 15, 2004. Information obtained from this meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a comprehensive desk audit, including review of a representative sample of student records, as well as reviews of district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information, and conducted further parent interviews by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, warranting only minor revision, which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

District Strengths:

Northern Valley Regional High School is commended for their "Hand in Hand Club" which provides opportunities for students with developmental disabilities who attend local high schools and those who live within the district, but go to special schools. The

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Hand in Hand Club provides opportunities for training in social and daily living skills as well as leisure activities. Students are also exposed to transition opportunities.

The district is further commended for their SUCCESS program, which is a work internship program designed to develop partnerships between businesses and the students in the language learning disabilities program. Objectives include building a framework for career awareness and work-based learning experiences; providing students with opportunities for students to learn essential workforce skills; developing mentor-to-student relationships; and connecting school-based learning with career requirements. Primarily for juniors, the program bridges youth to the world of work providing career sampling, exploration, training and success for employment. Students sample approximately six different work sites throughout the course of the year. They work for 5 hours a week a and work at each site for 6-8 weeks. A paraprofessional assists the students at work as well as in a self-evaluation and then evaluates their progress at the job site. Job sites have included Blockbuster, Charlie Browns, and the town library, Town Hall, the Florist, A&P and Sunrise Assisted Living.

The district has emphasized transition services for students to post secondary education. A special education teacher has had responsibility for administering the interest inventories to help students with disabilities identify vocational interests and aptitudes. This year, the district has hired a part-time transition counselor to secure employment in the community and to perform job-coaching functions for students after school, in the evening and on weekends.

Data Summary:

For the past four years the Northern Valley Regional High School classification rate for students requiring special education and related services has been slightly lower than the state average (12.1% in 2003, 11.7% in 2002, 10.8% in 2001 & 10.7% in 2000). The district needs to review the placements of students in separate settings as there are currently 46 (16.3%) students out of 279 that are placed in buildings without general education students. Further, the district's trend over the past four years has been to place more students in the general educational setting (i.e., 60.2% for 80% of the day), providing them with exposure to their nondisabled peers. Yearly fluctuations in the number of special education students remaining in the mainstream setting for more than eighty percent of the school day may reflect the unique needs of students entering the district. Review of data shows an equitable distribution of students across various placements based on their category of eligibility.

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 area of in-service training for parent, professional and paraprofessional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. . During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of transfer students.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, written notices and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of notices in native language and independent evaluations.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21, pre-referral interventions, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately

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implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments, written reports and acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of functional assessment.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area planning meeting and participants.

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting

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No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timeline, IEPs to parents and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting/participants, considerations/required components, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards and ninety day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process for least restrictive environment, consideration of supplemental aides and services and general education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, age 16 needed transition services and student and agency invitation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of Age 16 needed transition services.

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No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of convening documentation to the case manager, IEP team meeting for removals of ten or more school days and behavioral intervention plans (BIP) and functional behavioral assessments (FBA). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of documentation to case manager and functional behavioral assessments.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of statewide assessment.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP requirements, out-of-district participation written notice of graduation and diploma.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site regarding documentation of written notice of graduation. This area of need is covered under Section XV, Student Records.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction and consultation time.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of common planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the area of consultation time.

No additional areas of need were identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and adult-student access to records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding maintenance and destruction of records.

Area(s) of Need:

Maintenance and destruction of Records - Interviews with the director, administrative assistant and record review indicated that relevant notices of graduation were purged from recent graduates' files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that pupil record rules and regulations are implemented in the district. The plan must include secretarial procedures in maintaining students' files, and a measure of the effectiveness of the in-service training and an oversight component.**

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed at Northern Valley Regional High School on November 22, 2004. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 its exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that, with minor revision, will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of data indicated the district has maintained a rate of classification slightly below the state average for the past four years. Improvements in its Intervention and Referral Service as well as expanded general educational resources were identified as having a positive impact. In addition, more than 60% of students with disabilities are placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day. Data show an equitable distribution of students across various instructional settings, based on category of eligibility and racial-gender groupings.

At a public focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, twenty-two parents, child study team members and an administrator attended. In general, parents expressed satisfaction regarding many of the district's programs and services. Several parents expressed concerns regarding teachers' actual knowledge of and implementation of the IEP, specifically program modifications included in the IEP. These concerns were recognized by the district and the district's improvement plan addresses these issues. Most parents felt that the child study team was responsive to their children's needs and that communication between the case manager and parent is good.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day, facilities, certifications, consent, notice of meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, meetings, referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement, disagreement rationale, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process for least restrictive environment, considerations of supplemental aids and services, general education access, suspension tracking, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards, participation in statewide assessment, statewide assessment accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternative assessment, process for exemption from passing, graduation requirements, participation of out-of-district students, diploma, class size waivers, age range waivers, group size for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access sheets, and documentation of locations of additional records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-service training for parents, professional and paraprofessional staff, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, transfer students, surrogate parents,

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written notices, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multidisciplinary assessments, functional assessments, written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meeting and participants, considerations/required components, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, ninety day timelines, decision-making process, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aides and services, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, age fourteen and sixteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, student transition invitation, documentation to case manage, convening an IEP team meeting for removals of ten or more school days, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, common planning time and parent and student access requests.

The on-site visit identified only one additional area of need within various standards regarding maintenance written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Northern Valley Regional School District will revise the improvement plan and submit revisions to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the additional area of need.