

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district provides third and fourth grade general education teachers training in the remedial reading program entitled Preventing Academic Failure. The teachers provide specialized reading instruction and support to students who are experiencing difficulty.

The district also participates in the regional preschool program known as PIE, Preschool Instruction for the Exceptional (Child). Many preschool students with disabilities who participate in this program are included into general education preschool programs for part of the day.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Northvale School District's rate of students receiving special education and services (excluding eligible for speech and language services) has been below the state average with classification rates of 9.5% (2001), 10.4% (2002) and 11.3% (2003). For students ages 6 to 21, the district's trend over the past 3 years has been to place fewer students receiving special education in the general educational setting for more than 80% of the day; however, 68% of students in special education fall into the categories of students placed in general education for 40-80% and more than 80% of the day which is similar to the state average of 71.9% for those two categories. Additionally, review of data indicates that the district has consistently placed preschool students with disabilities in a combined special education and general education program at a rate significantly above the state average. Further, parent and staff interviews report overall satisfaction with the Region III Preschool PIE program, slice of PIE, and "nibble" of PIE program, components of the PIE program that offer opportunities for education with typical peers.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Pre-School Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the 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 provision of programs and related services of speech, counseling, occupational and physical therapy including goals and objectives, length of school day and year, transfer students, certifications and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of extended school year, length of day and year and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices in native language, written notice, and documenting attempts for parent participation to attend meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports, documentation of acceptance and rejection of outside evaluations, and IEPs for transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of written notice for statement of eligibility, and providing a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to a meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of provision of written notice for statement of eligibility.

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 IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, copy of IEP to parents, annual review timelines, teacher access and responsibility, implementation dates and ninety day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of present levels of educational performance. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in 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 and continuum of programs.

An additional area of need was identified during the focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit regarding the documentation of least restrictive environment.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Least Restrictive Environment Decisions and Pre-School General Education Placement Decisions- During the comprehensive audit, record

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review indicated that the district's IEP does not consistently include all four statements required when determining the least restrictive environment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications; the explanation of why the supplementary aids, services and program modifications are not appropriate; the documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting; the documentation of the comparison of the benefits for the student and the documentation of the extracurricular and nonacademic participation. Implementation of these activities will document the decision-making process and more clearly define the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. It is recommended that the district review the state annotated IEP form for guidance on completing these IEP components.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests and student/agency invitation. The district improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

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Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the **Northvale School District** November 8, 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 an exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify almost all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about compliance. 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 identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. 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 classification rate of students receiving special education and services (excluding eligible for speech and language services) well below the state average. Additionally, review of data indicates that the district placed preschool students with disabilities in combined general education and special education early childhood settings significantly above the state averages. 68% of students ages six to twenty-one are educated in general education settings for more 40% of the day which is slightly less than the state average of 71.9%.

At a public focus group meeting attended by approximately ten parents, participants expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents praised the Region III Preschool Instruction for the Exceptional (Child) known as PIE program. Although parents feel that they are involved in the education of their child, some parents would like to be made aware of additional program options. Further, although parents feel that student programs promote a high quality of education, some parents would like more information about curriculum.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the focus meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit included staff and parent training, policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services for speech, counseling, occupational and physical therapy including goals and objectives and frequency, location and duration, facilities, certifications, consent, notice of meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, re-evaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, signatures of agreement and/or disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, copy of IEP to parents, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, continuum of programs, pre-school transition planning conference, transition to preschool by age 3, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards, notification to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plan, interim alternative educational setting, manifestation determination, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class sizes and waivers, age range and waivers,

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group sizes for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, length of day and year, transfer students, surrogate parents, notices in native language, written notice, documenting attempts for parent participation to attend meetings, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports, documentation of acceptance or rejection of outside evaluations and IEPs for transfer students, provision of written notice for statement of eligibility, provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, present levels of educational performance, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests and student and agency invitation.

During the comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the self-identified areas of extended school year, length of day and year, transfer students, functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports, documentation of acceptance or rejection of outside evaluations and IEPs for transfer students, written notice for statement of eligibility and present level of educational performance.

The focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and comprehensive desk audit identified an additional area of need within the various standards, regarding documentation of least restrictive environment decisions for preschool and school-age students with disabilities.

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