

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

District: Norwood County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: April 7, 2005

Monitor: Gladys Miller and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the **Norwood School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Norwood School District** 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 areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The **Norwood School District** 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 the **Norwood School** on the evening of April 5, 2005. 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. Parent interviews were conducted 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 which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

District Strengths:

The Norwood School District is commended for providing a number of programs that provide support in the early grades and maximize access for students with disabilities to general education classrooms. A strong core reading program implemented in first and second grades has improved students reading ability and has decreased referrals to special education. All students who receive special education are included in a general education homeroom and lunch period commensurate with their chronological age at a minimum.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district provides a Basic skills program for kindergarten through grade 6 students in the areas of reading, math and language arts. Before and after school, district teachers offer one-to-one and small group instruction as well as a lunchtime tutoring program.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Norwood School District's rate of students receiving special education and services (excluding eligible for speech and language services) has been decreasing and is currently below the state average with at 13.13 %. For students ages 6 to 21, the district's trend over the past 3 years has been a drop in the number of students educated in general education for more than 80% of the school day; however, 89.1 % of students with disabilities are educated in general education for more than 40% of the day. In addition, only 3.6% of students with disabilities are educated in separate public and private school settings. This percentage is significantly lower than the state average of 9.4%. Additionally, review of data indicates that the district has placed preschool students with disabilities in a combination of special education and general education programs significantly above the state average in the 2002 and 2003 school years and significantly below in the year 2004. However, percentages need to be viewed with caution as students classified in this category are relatively small in number. Additionally parent and staff interviews report overall satisfaction with the Region III Preschool program.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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 a concern in the area of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. 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.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notices in native language. 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 and has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of surrogate parents.

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, health summary and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find, vision and hearing screenings 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, functional assessments, and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, acceptance and rejection of reports, independent evaluations and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations and written reports for students

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

eligible for speech language. 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, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement or disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of 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 initiated 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.

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, annual review timelines, teacher access and responsibility and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of present levels of educational performance, IEPs to parents and ninety day timelines. 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 initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas and has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of present levels of educational performance.

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 procedural safeguards, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plan and manifestation determination.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of interim alternative educational setting. 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 XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding access sheets and access requests. The districts 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 this area.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

Special education monitoring was completed in the **Norwood School District** on April 7, 2005. 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 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, some 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) below the state average. For ages 6 to 21, 89.1% of their students are educated in general education settings for more 40% of the day which is significantly above the state average of 71.9%. Additionally, the district only places 3.6% of their students in separate public and private school settings. This percentage is significantly lower than the state average of 9.4%.

At a public focus group meeting attended by five parents, participants expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents responded positively to issues regarding parental participation as well as their child's access to general education in the least restrictive environment. One parent expressed concern regarding the reauthorization of IDEA and its affect on the program of their child.

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, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notice of meetings, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, health summary, identification meeting timelines and participants, standardized assessments(ESERS), functional assessments (ESERS), written reports (ESERS), bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of outside reports, re-evaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and or disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district, notification and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, pre-school transition planning conference, transition to preschool by age 3, age fourteen transitions service needs, preferences and interests, student invitation, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards, notification to case manager, suspension tracking , functional behavioral

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

assessments, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class sizes and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, consultation time, 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, surrogate parents, notices in native language, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, functional assessments, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports for students eligible for speech-language services, provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, present levels of educational performance, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, interim alternative educational setting, access requests and access sheets.

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, surrogate parents, present level of educational performance, access requests and access sheets.

No additional areas of need were identified; therefore, the improvement plan submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education in June, 2004 will be reviewed for final approval. Verification of implementation will be conducted by the County Office of Education.