

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Nutley Public Schools

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: January 22, 23, and 24, 2002

Monitoring Team: Damen Cooper, Janet Wright, Zola Mills, Gladys Miller, Susan Smahl

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Nutley Public Schools District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Nutley Public Schools 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 Nutley Public School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Nutley High School on January 15, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district should be commended for its outstanding School-to-Career Transition Program that involves participation by local community and business leaders, parents, students and school personnel. This program allows students to participate in extensive career exploration and job shadowing.

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A diversity exchange program exists between Washington Elementary School and Plainfield Elementary School.

The district participates in an inclusion training model for teachers in conjunction with Montclair State University. It should also be noted that a strong sense of community was stated as a strength by parents, students, staff and administrators.

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/parent development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, related services and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, transfer students and facilities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings and independent evaluations. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, health summary, identification meeting timelines and participants. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the area of the referral process. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district needs to revise its improvement to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings.

Area of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screenings – During the on-site visit it was determined that although the district has a procedure for conducting vision and hearing screenings and is, in fact, conducting them, they are not maintaining documentation that these screenings are being conducted.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include a procedure to ensure the district maintains documentation that vision and hearing screenings are conducted whenever a student is referred for an evaluation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of this procedure.**

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and written reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. The district further identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS) and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an

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administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations for ESLs and preschool students and the use of standardized assessments for preschool eligible students.

Areas of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluation for ESLs and Preschool Students – During the on-site, a review of records indicated that the ESLs evaluations and preschool evaluations did not include required components. ESLs evaluations lacked teacher input and preschool evaluations consisted of only one CST evaluation and a speech evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multidisciplinary evaluations for ESLs contain the required components. The procedures must also ensure preschool evaluations contain at least two child study team assessments in addition to a speech assessment since the speech assessment is not considered one of the required child study team assessments. The plan must include an in-service component and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent and correct implementation of the procedures.**

Standardized Assessment – During the on-site, a review of records indicated that standardized assessments are not being conducted when evaluating preschool students, even when a standardized assessment is appropriate.

- **The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure standardized assessments are used, when determined appropriate, when evaluating preschool students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at planning meetings and turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and planning meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of needs because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

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

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VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding criteria and documentation of eligibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding meetings and copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas 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 participants at the eligibility meeting for students determined eligible for ESLs and preschool students.

Area of Need:

Participants – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the general education teacher is not consistently included as a participant at eligibility meetings for students determined eligible for ESLs and preschool students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all required participants attend eligibility meetings. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation dates, age of majority and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), annual review timelines and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site, interview and record reviews indicated the district has already initiated activities that are bringing about the required changes in the areas of CCCS and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs. The district further identified concerns in the area of considerations/required statements. The district has developed an improvement plan that 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.

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

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IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding nonacademic & extracurricular participation and continuum for kindergarten through twelfth grade.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the individualized decision-making process, Oberti factors and considerations/required statements. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the preschool continuum.

Area of Need:

Preschool Continuum - During the on-site visit, interviews with staff indicated that all preschool eligible students are placed in self-contained preschool disabled classes because the district does not provide access to programs with non-disabled peers.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure preschoolers have the opportunity to receive instructional services with their non-disabled peers. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure a full continuum of placement options is available for consideration by child study team members. The plan must further include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

X. Transition

Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences/interests and age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of courses of study, agency involvement and student/agency invite. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Transition from Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of early intervention to preschool disabled by age three.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding attendance at the preschool transition planning conference.

Area of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference – During the on-site, it was determined that although staff participate in preschool transition planning conferences, the district does not document this participation in student files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district maintains documentation of attendance at preschool transition planning conferences. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of this procedures.**

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations/modifications and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of IEP documentation. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of choice of diploma and participation in graduation activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of IEP requirements. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the provision of written notice of graduation.

Area of Need:

Documentation of Written Notice – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated the district is not maintaining documentation of the provision of written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of written notice of graduation is documented in student files. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of this procedure.**

XIV. Programs And Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size/waivers, age range/waivers and group size for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of home instruction and common planning time for general and special education teachers. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance, destruction and documentation of other locations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent/adult student access to student records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 Nutley Public School District on January 22, 23, and 24, 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 thorough and 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 that were 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 and during parent interviews, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. However, some parents indicated they believed that at times there is insufficient communication between parents and school personnel. Interviews with adult students during the on-site visit reiterated satisfaction with Nutley Public School District programs and services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included the areas of policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, related services, length of day/year, certifications, native language, direct referrals (parent/staff), summer referrals, bilingual evaluations, participants at planning meetings, turning age five, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, continuum for Kindergarten through twelve, age of majority, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences/interests, age sixteen needed transition services, early intervention to preschool by age three, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations/modifications, alternate assessment, choice of diploma, graduation participation, class size/waiver, age range/waivers, group sizes/speech therapy, access sheets, maintenance, destruction and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, extended school year, transfer students, facilities, surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notices, meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, health summary, timelines and participants for identification meetings, multi-disciplinary evaluations for ESERS, functional assessment, written reports, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning and eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, goals & objectives related to the CCCS, annual review timelines, teacher access/responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration for regular education statements, regular education access, courses, agency involvement, student/agency invitation, discipline, IEP documentation, home instruction and access/request for student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding documentation of vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments for preschool disabled, multidisciplinary assessments for ESLs and preschool disabled,

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participants at ESLS and preschool disabled eligibility meetings, continuum for preschool disabled, preschool transition planning conference and written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.

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