

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

District: Oakland School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: April 12, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Oakland Public Schools** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Oakland Public Schools** 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 **Oakland Public Schools** 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 meeting for parents and community members at the Valley Middle School on November 16, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a modified 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 service personnel, and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with child study team members and administrators. Additional interviews were conducted with parents 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 need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for piloting an integrated kindergarten program. Students with disabilities participated in two general education kindergarten classes with supplemental services and supports. A teacher of the handicapped and three trained paraprofessionals assist in these classes.

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The district is also commended for the Threshold Program provided during the summer months. This program is designed to provide learning discovery for all children entering first or second grades. The goal of this program is to maintain skills already accomplished and develop emerging or deficient areas. Classroom teachers complete a profile for each child that he or she recommends to the program. The profile identifies strengths and areas of need as defined by curricula benchmarks and details the child's program for progress while in the program. All teachers of the Threshold Program are reading or math specialists.

Data Summary:

Based on a review of the data, the district has placed nearly all preschool students with disabilities in restrictive settings such as private special education schools or in the preschool disabled program. To address this issue, the district plans to provide training to team members and develop relationships with community preschools. However, the district is commended for educating less than 10% of students with disabilities in the age range of 6-14 in restrictive settings. Over 35% of school aged students with disabilities are educated in general education setting more than 40% of the school day while more than 55% of school aged students with disabilities are educated in general education setting more than 80% of the school day. These percentages are above the state average of 41% and 30% respectively.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions, Re-evaluation, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services, goals and objectives, frequency, duration and location of services, length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of facilities and transfer students. 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 III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and notices of meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of surrogate parents and notices of meetings.

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 direct referrals, identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and date-stamping new referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process and date-stamping new referrals.

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

Section VI: Evaluation:

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports signed and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, functional assessments, written reports dated, acceptance and rejection of reports with rationale. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments and written reports dated.

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 and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of statement of eligibility for speech language services and provision of evaluation reports 10 days prior to eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of statement of eligibility for speech language services.

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 meetings and participants, IEPs to parents, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, statement of activities to assist transition to secondary level, teacher request for CST consultation and goals and objectives reflecting present levels of educational performance (PLEP). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the areas of considerations and required statements and goals and objectives reflecting PLEP.

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 area of notification and participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of the decision making process, regular education access in district and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of documentation of the decision making process.

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting and provision of procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation to case manager. 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 XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of common planning time for general education and special education collaboration, additional child study team staff and class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the area of common planning time for general education and special education collaboration.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Oakland Public Schools on April 12, 2005. 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has brought about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

The district is commended for its implementation of the Transitional Kindergarten and Threshold Programs.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring visit and additional parent interviews, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs, services and staff. Parents were especially pleased with the many programs and services available within the district that provide significant opportunities for placement within the mainstream setting. Many parents expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement in the IEP process and the receptiveness of the case managers and the Director of Special Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and services, goals and objectives for related services, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, length of school day and year, certifications, consent, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals, identification meetings, participants and timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports signed, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, IEPs to parents, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, teacher responsibility, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3, age 14 transition service needs, preference and interests, surveys and assessments, invitation, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural safeguards, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessment, IEP requirements at age 14, class sizes and waivers, age ranges and waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding facilities, transfer procedures, surrogate parents, notice of meetings, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing

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screening, date-stamping new referrals, standardized assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, functional assessments, reports dated, acceptance and rejection of reports with rationale, statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services, copy of evaluation reports to parents, considerations and required statements, statement of activities to assist transition from middle school to secondary setting, teacher request for CST consultation, goals and objectives reflective of present levels of educational performance, documentation of decision making process, regular education access within district, continuum of programs, documentation to case manager, common planning time for general education and special education collaboration, additional CST staff and class descriptions.

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

During the on-site comprehensive desk audit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the self-identified areas of surrogate parents, notice of meetings, Child Find 3-21, referral process, date-stamping new referrals, standardized assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, functional assessments, written reports dated, statement of eligibility for eligible for speech and language services, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives reflective of present levels of educational performance, documentation of decision making process and common planning time.

The original improvement plan submitted in June, 2004 will be reviewed for final approval. Verification of compliance in the remaining areas of need will be conducted by the County Office of Education.