

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

District: Ocean Gate School District

County: Ocean

Monitoring Dates: June 4, 2003

Monitoring Team: Michelle Davis, Barbara Tucker and Kimberly Murray

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Ocean Gate School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Ocean Gate School 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 Ocean Gate School District 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 group meeting for parents and community members at the Ocean Gate School District on June 4, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

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

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the following programs that include students with disabilities:

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A **Safety Patrol Program** enables all sixth grade students to participate and take an active part in the school's Charter Education Program, which works in conjunction with the overall school effort to create a "Bully Free" environment.

Reading Buddies allows sixth graders to "buddy up" with kindergartners every three weeks to read, write, and work on special projects together.

Additionally, students have the opportunity to participate in the **Peer Learning Activities** where elementary level students become peer tutors for primary level students utilizing technology skills, teaching lessons and following up on acquired skills.

Students are also encouraged to participate in **Pen Pals** which provides them with an opportunity to write letters to students in Forest Hills, Maryland.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Transition 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of adaptive physical education, provision of programs/related services and transfer students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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During the self-assessment process, the district also identified a concern in the area of goals/objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, provision of notice of meetings, provision of written notice and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices in native languages, interpreters at meetings and ensuring parental participation at meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding content of notices of meetings and written notices.

Area(s) of Need:

Content of Notice of Meetings and Written Notice - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that notices of meetings and written notices do not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise its notices of meetings and written notices to include all of the required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the forms developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals from parents and teachers and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, health summary and vision/hearing screening. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find Activities - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that the district's child find activities are conducted through the Monmouth-Ocean Jointure Commission and only addresses children ages three through five.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district develops child find outreach activities to locate, identify and refer potentially disabled students ages three through twenty-one.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, signed and dated written reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that evaluation reports do not include documentation of the interventions attempted by the classroom teacher.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports contain all of the required components of a functional assessment in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d). The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the IEP meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a

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review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings and participants, statements of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding considerations/required statements in IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

Considerations/Required Statements in IEPs - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that the district's current IEP format does not include all of the required statements/considerations.

- **The district will revise its IEP format to include all of the required statements and considerations. It is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of least restrictive environment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of supplemental aids/services, regular education access, decision-making process, notification/participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and continuum of programs. Instructional staff, child study team members and the superintendent/principal/director identified barriers as poor teacher attitudes and resistance to any activity that resulted in the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case managers and short-term removals. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of alternate proficiency assessment. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

This section is not applicable in this preschool through grade six district.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and insufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas 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 Ocean Gate School District on June 4, 2003. 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents also applauded the district's efforts to ensure their parental participation in the IEP decision-making process and the district's resource center programs. However, concerns were expressed regarding teacher participation at IEP meetings. Overall, parents commended the district for having high quality educational programs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, frequency/duration/location of related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, provision of notice of meetings, provision of written notice, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals from parent/teachers, identification meeting timelines/participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, signed and dated written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, three-year timelines, reevaluation planning meetings/participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility meetings/participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility for SLD, documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility, IEP meetings and participants, statements of present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, documentation of least restrictive environment, class-size waivers, group-size for speech therapy, age-range waivers, home instruction, parent access/requests, access sheets and documentation of other location of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, adaptive physical education, provision of programs/related services, goals/objectives for related services, transfer students, notices in native languages, interpreters at meetings, parental participation at meetings, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision/hearing screening, evaluation reports to parents, consideration of supplemental aids/services, regular education access, decision-making process, notification/participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, documentation to case managers, short-term removals, alternate proficiency assessment, consultation time and sufficient staff.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding content of notices of meeting and written notices, child find activities, functional assessments, and considerations/required statements in IEPs.

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