

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Old Tappan School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: May 12 & 13, 2005

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2003 – 2004 school year, the **Old Tappan School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Old Tappan 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 Old Tappan School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need. Throughout the improvement plan, administrative oversight is identified as the responsibility of the director. The Old Tappan school does not currently employ a Director of Special Services; therefore the plan will need revisions identifying person(s) responsible to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

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 Charles DeWolf School on May 12, 2005. 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. A representative sample of student records was reviewed and interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for providing several programs that enhance the quality of education for both students with disabilities and nondisabled students. The district

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

provides a peer to peer program that addresses substance abuse prevention for the middle school students and provides positive peer role models. The district also provides a creative curriculum extension program that features outreach to the community. To assist in the transition to high school, eighth grade students meet in groups during their lunch period to discuss topics such as transition issues, self-esteem and the effects of peer pressure.

Data Summary:

A review of the district data for the last three years, indicated that over 60% of the district's students with IEPs are educated with their nondisabled peers more than 80% of the school day. This percentage exceeds the state average of 41.6%.

The district reported a classification rate of 14.3% for students eligible for special education and related services during the 2003-2004 school year. This is comparable to the state average for that year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Individualized Education Program, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements 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 the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies and procedures 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 sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding parent training.

Area(s) of Need:

Parent Training – During the on-site visit, interviews and the parent focus meeting indicated that the district does not provide direct training of parents.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that training is provided for parents to facilitate parental participation in the special education process. The plan must include the development and distribution of a needs assessment to determine the topics that need to be addressed.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and provision of programs and the related services of speech, counseling, occupational therapy and physical therapy. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area. The plan lacks an administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notice of meetings, written notice, 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 insufficient to address these areas due to the lack of an administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of child find, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and health summaries. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas due to the lack of an administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

Hearing and Vision Screenings – During the onsite monitoring visit, record review and interviews indicated that hearing and vision screenings for newly referred students are not provided.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities and training to ensure that the results of hearing and vision screenings are provided to the child study team for identification meetings. The plan must**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized and functional assessments, signed and dated written reports and bilingual evaluations.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of providing copies of evaluation report to parents and adult students ten days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area since the district lacks an administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, general education access and continuum of programs.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

Area(s) of Need:

Notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities - During the on-site monitoring, record review and parent interviews indicated that students who are placed out of district are not notified of, and given the opportunity to participate in, extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure students educated out of district are notified of extracurricular and nonacademic activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of class size waiver. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area as the district lacks administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of access to and requests for student records. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas as it lacks administrative oversight as noted on page 1 of this report.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Old Tappan School District on May 12 and 13, 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that, with the addition of an oversight mechanism will address all identified areas of need. 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 has a classification rate commensurate with the state average. A total 60% of students with disabilities in the district are educated in general education classes for more than 80% of the day. This rate exceeds the state average.

At a focus group meeting held during the onsite monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Although all parents indicated that they are very involved in the IEP process, some indicated they are not made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, identification timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, three year timelines, planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility SLD, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of education performance, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access in district, continuum of programs, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural safeguards, statewide assessment participation, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, IEP documentation, IEP requirements at age 14, age range waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, extended school year, provision of related services, surrogate parents, notices in native language, pre-referral interventions, health summary, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to meeting, class size waivers and access to and requests for student records.

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

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training, vision and hearing screenings, and notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities for students educated in separate settings outside of the district.

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