

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

District: Oldmans Township School District

County: Salem

Monitoring Dates: December 2 and 3, 2003

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano and Caryl Carthew

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Oldmans Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Oldmans Township 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 Oldmans Township 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 Oldmans Township Middle School on November 18, 2003. No parents or staff attended the meeting.

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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist, parents, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Oldmans Township School District is commended for its "Family Connections" program that introduces 4 year olds and their families to the kindergarten program. Parents are provided with information regarding skills that will help the children be

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

successful in kindergarten. Also, the parents and children have opportunities throughout the school year to meet staff and participate in programs at the school.

The district is further commended for its "Character Counts" program which introduces and reinforces the ideals of citizenship and develops a positive school climate. In addition, the district participates in the Municipal Alliance program that encourages good decision making and teaches students to make positive choices.

The Oldmans Township School District is a K-8 district with fewer than 320 resident students. The district takes great pride in the role it plays in the community. The district utilizes a before and after school Latch Key program that provides enrichment activities for all students in a safe environment. Additionally, district staff members have begun a 4-H program for the students.

Part One Data Summary:

A three year review of district data indicated a decrease in the number of students with disabilities receiving services in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. During the 2001-2002 school year 50.8 % of classified students were placed in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. This was above the state's average of 42%. However, there was a significant decrease in the 2002-2003 school year when only 26.3% of classified students were placed in general education settings with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day. District staff indicated that because students were typically receiving only supports and services in general education programs, they were unsuccessful. Instead of developing in-class support options, the district placed these students in pull-out resource center programs. As a result of the self-assessment process and in response to these data, the district has indicated the need to increase opportunities to provide special education services in general education programs by increasing the availability of in-class resource programs. The district's improvement plan will be sufficient to address this concern.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, IEP, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, 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 themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities, and staff certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives for related services, procedures for transfer students, and procedures for maintaining hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that when extended school year (ESY) services are warranted, the IEP lacks a description of the ESY program, type, duration and frequency of services, and goals/objectives.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs contain a description of the ESY program, including type, frequency, and duration of services as well as goals and objectives. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive extended school year services that support the educational program and address the issues related to regression/recoupment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/ reevaluation/release of student records, provision of notice of a meeting, conducting required meetings, provision of written notice, conducting independent evaluations, and native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for locating and training surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, and identification meetings timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of summer referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screening - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that when a student is referred to the child study team for a special education evaluation by the parent, hearing and vision screenings are not conducted by the school nurse prior to the identification meeting. The district has a procedure in place for referral by the Intervention and Referral Services Team, only.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that vision and hearing screening are conducted for all students referred to the child study team for a special education evaluation. Implementation of these activities will ensure the identification team members have the information necessary to assess all areas of suspected disability. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that the full child study team is not in attendance at the identification meeting and the speech-language therapist is not attending identification meetings for preschool age children.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the full child study team attends identification meetings and the special-language specialist attends when the student is preschool age or when the suspected disability is a language disorder. Implementation of these activities will ensure the appropriate participants are in attendance at meetings and are involved in the decision-making process regarding the need for an evaluation. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

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 assessments, standardized assessments, development of written reports, provision of bilingual evaluations when required, and documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of outside reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments and functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services, and signed and dated written reports for students eligible for speech/language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessment - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and a review of records that functional assessments do not consistently include parent interviews.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that functional assessments contain all required components identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)2. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on all required data obtained through the assessment process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for conducting reevaluation planning meetings, and reevaluations for classified students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for conducting eligibility meetings, appropriate application of eligibility criteria, certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determination, and documentation of eligibility determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 themselves compliant in the documentation of the Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

access to regular education programs, and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of areas of individualized decision-making, and continuum of services. The district improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of transition service needs for students age 14 or younger.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in implementation of IEP for preschool disabled students no later than age 3.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of area of documentation of participation in the transition planning conference. The district improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 Oldmans Township School District on December 2 and 3, 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.

A review of data indicated areas of concern regarding placement in the least restrictive environment for school age students. Data submitted by the district indicated that there has been a significant decrease in the number of students with disabilities being educated in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. As a result of the self-assessment process, the district has identified the need to increase its in-class support/replacement resource program across all grade levels and subject areas.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, no parents attended. Telephone interviews with parents indicated their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents identified the need for more in-class support programs. This area was identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, parent/staff development, dissemination of public information, length of school day/year, facilities, staff certification, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/ reevaluation/release of student records, provision of notice of a meeting, conducting required meetings, provision of written notice, conducting independent evaluations, notices in native language, Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, identification meetings timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments and standardized assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, development of written reports, provision of bilingual evaluations when required, documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of outside reports, reevaluation planning meetings/participants, reevaluations by June 30th of classified students' last year in preschool, procedures for conducting eligibility meetings/participants, appropriate application of eligibility criteria, certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determination, documentation of eligibility determinations, convening IEP meetings with required participants, considerations/required statements in IEPs, present levels of educational performance statements, goal/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, provision of IEPs to parents, annual reviews, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, documentation of the Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, notification/participation to out of district students of nonacademic/extracurricular activities within district, access to general education programs, transition service needs for students age 14 or younger, implementation of IEP for preschool disabled students no later than age 3, discipline procedures, participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessments, accommodation/modification in statewide assessments, graduation requirements, out of district participation in graduation activities, class size, age range group size for speech-language therapy,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

home instruction, consultation time between regular education and special education teachers, procedures for granting access to records, documentation of access to confidential records, documentation of other locations of student records, and procedure for maintenance/destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding goals/objectives for related services, maintenance of hearing aids, transfer procedures, procedures for locating and training surrogate parents, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary assessments and standardized assessments for students eligible for speech-language services, signed and dated reports for students eligible for speech-language services, reevaluation timeline, provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to eligibility meeting, individual decision-making, and continuum of services.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year services, vision/hearing screening prior to identification meeting for students referred for an evaluation for special education and related services, appropriate participants at the identification meeting, and components of functional assessments.

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