

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

District: Palisades Park School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: April 5 and 6, 2003

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller and Damen Cooper

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Palisades Park School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Palisades Park 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 Palisades Park 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 Board of Education office on April 1, 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 their commitment to community service. All students who have completed required graduation credits are able to volunteer in a work environment. Students work in the elementary schools, local businesses, law firms and the local newspaper.

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The district plan to provide centers for all students through a partnership grant - Access, Collaboration, Equity - from the New Jersey Department of Education for the purpose of increasing student achievement in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Language Arts Literacy and World Languages. These centers will be opened in Palisades Park and Cliffside Park to increase the opportunity for family involvement in their children's education by providing after school access to technology resources.

The district also provides homework help and bilingual tutoring in collaboration with Fairleigh Dickinson University. Reading incentive programs, story hours and loaner books as well as English, computer and internet and GED classes, are available to all students in collaboration with the community public libraries and Chamber of Commerce.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation was determined to be an area 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 concerns in the areas of training for professional and paraprofessional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 extended school year, length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services goals and objectives, frequency, duration and location, and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. In addition, the district identified concerns in the area of facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district also identified concerns in the area of provision of services due to limited staff. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need as 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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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 area of independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native languages and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. In addition, the district identified concerns in the area of identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas as it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations, and copy of evaluation reports to parents and adult students ten days prior to meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 teacher responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines and teacher access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, notification and participation of out of district nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 areas of agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interest survey and assessment, age sixteen transition services and student invite. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of functional behavioral analysis and behavior intervention plan.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, manifestation determination, interim alternative

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educational setting and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 approved accommodations and modifications and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation and alternate assessment. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of program descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of program descriptions.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access requests and amendments, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 Palisades Park School District on April 5 and 6, 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 this review the district was able to identify 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 prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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, the parent who attended the meeting expressed her appreciation for the efforts of the school staff on behalf of her child. The parent did express concerns about the size of the school and difficulties that students have transitioning to a large high school setting at seventh grade. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services when contacted by telephone interviews.

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, extended school year, length of school day/year, certifications, independent evaluations, direct referrals, acceptance and rejection of reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation planning meeting participants, teacher responsibility, agency invite, functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessment, IEP documentation, graduation requirements, participation and written notice of graduation, class size, age range, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and paraprofessional training, provision of programs, related services, transfer students, facilities, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, Child Find, referral processes, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary, standardized and functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines and evaluations completed by June 30th of a students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objective aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access, least restrictive environment decision making process, documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, notification of out of district students for nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, transition service needs for age fourteen and sixteen year old students, preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, documentation to case manager and suspension tracking, manifestation determination, and interim alternative

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educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, alternate assessments, program descriptions, case management, access requests and amendments, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

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

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