

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

District: Park Ridge School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: October 20 – 21, 2003

Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Jenifer Spear, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2002 - 2003 school year, the Park Ridge School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Park Ridge 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 Park Ridge 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 West Ridge Elementary School on October 15, 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:

Park Ridge School District has an extensive system of staff development which includes in-house resources, professional consultants and collegial planning to assist their teachers in the acquisition of skills regarding the implementation of new and innovative strategies and programs. Special education teachers are included in these staff development activities in all curricular areas and meet regularly with their regular

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education peers to share their knowledge and expertise regarding strategies to instruct disabled students.

The district has committed itself to a broad-based inclusive education initiative. This commitment is confirmed by the large percentage of students with disabilities being educated in general education settings and the rising test scores. Interviews with staff throughout the district further reinforced the systemic commitment to, and acceptance of, inclusive practices.

The district provides a Career Internship Program (CIP) which affords more significantly disabled high school students the opportunity to prepare for independent living and successful work experiences. Students in this program are provided with vocational experiences and training in various areas which further assists students in transitioning into their chosen career.

Data Summary:

Over 74% of special education students are educated in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, which is above the state average of 41.6%. In the 2002-2003 school year, there were few opportunities for preschool disabled students to be educated in an integrated setting. Therefore, 81.8% of these students were educated in a special education program while 18.2% were educated in a general education setting. Although an inclusive preschool setting is in place, the district needs to explore links within the community to afford greater access to general education. In the 2002-2003 school year, Park Ridge had a classification rate of 11.7%, which is below the state average. During self assessment, the district did identify issues with child find and the pre-referral intervention process. All fourth grade students eligible for special education and related services participated in the 2003 ESPA and scored 100% proficient in Language Arts Literacy while 84% were proficient in Math.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Discipline 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 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, provision of programs, length of day and facilities.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding location of related services, and counseling goals and objectives.

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Area(s) of Need:

Location of Programs and Related Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the location for related services is not documented in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs specifically identify the location in which related services will be provided.**

Counseling Goals & Objectives – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined during record review that goals and objectives for counseling were not included in the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure goals and objectives are developed and included in IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure related service providers are aware of counseling needs and are able to determine progress in meeting therapy benchmarks.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notices of meetings, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notices and independent 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.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary and identification meeting timelines. 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.

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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 standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejections of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and written reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants in planning meetings and reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and planning 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 VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, statement of eligibility and Speech Language Specialist notification to CST.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of, criteria, signatures of agreement or disagreement rationale and copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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 VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, PLEPs, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of required statements, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding considerations and required statements, specifically in the area of accommodations and modifications.

Area(s) of Need:

Consideration and Required Statements/Accommodations and Modifications –

During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that student accommodations and modifications are not individualized. Instead, a majority of IEPs contain identical accommodations and modifications all of which are computer generated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure accommodations and modifications are based on the individual needs of the students. Implementation of these activities will insure each accommodation and/or modification is identified and provided to address the needs of the student and to allow the student to demonstrate the acquisition of specific education skills.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of notification and participation in OOD nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, LRE documentation, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, regular education access in-district and continuum of programs at the elementary level. 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.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding regular education access and continuum of programs at the preschool level.

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Area(s) of Need:

Regular Education Access and Continuum of Programs at the Preschool Level –

During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that although the district has an inclusive pre-school setting in the district, for the past three years it has only serviced approximately 20% of the 3-5 year old population. Discussions with the superintendent indicated the district has a long term plan to increase in-district inclusive preschool programs. However, until this expansion is accomplished the district needs to develop links with community based preschools to increase the number of seats in integrated settings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district establishes links with community based preschool programs, immediately expands its general education preschool program, or both to increase opportunities for preschool disabled students to be educated with their nondisabled peers.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of student and agency invite.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services and agency involvement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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 XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Student Review Assessment (SRA). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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 waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consultation time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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 XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access/requests, access sheets and staff knowledge. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. 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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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Park Ridge School District on October 20 and 21, 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 Park Ridge School District is to be commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic change in most areas. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of district data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students age 6-21 in the regular education setting for more than 80% of the school day. However, preschool inclusion does require improvement. The district's classification rate is 11.9% which is lower than the state average. This area was addressed in the self-assessment findings.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A number of parents praised the district's programs and staff, citing a change within the past two years. Some parents expressed concerns regarding pre-school access to general education, participation at IEP meetings and transition. Many of the concerns identified by the parents were 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 policies and procedures, professional/parent development, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, notices of meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, participants, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, accept/rejection of reports, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility, consideration/required statements, PLEPs, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, student/agency invite, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes, home instruction, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer students, surrogate parents, consent, written notices, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process/pre-referral interventions, health summary, ID meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary, written reports, reevaluation timelines, criteria, signature of agreement/disagreement-rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, individualized decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements,

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supplemental aids and services, regular education access and continuum for the elementary setting, age fourteen transition service needs, courses and preferences, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, SRA, consultation time, access to student records, access sheets and staff knowledge.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding location of related services, counseling goals and objectives, and accommodations and modifications and regular education access and continuum for preschool.

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