

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

District: Parsippany-Troy Hills Township Schools

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: March 19-26, 2001

Monitoring Team: Stephanie DeBruyne, Zola Mills, and Melinda Zangrillo

Background Information

During the 2000 - 2001 school year, the Parsippany-Troy Hills Township Schools conducted a self-assessment to determine whether the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to gather and review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

Parents and staff were invited to attend a public focus group meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Information collected by the district was the basis for its self-assessment document that cites strengths and areas of need. The district has developed activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified by the district as areas of need.

A second public focus group meeting was held in the district on March 13, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had some concerns.

District Strengths

The district has established a district-wide organization called Parents and Professionals of Exceptional Children (PEC). This is a support and advocacy group that sponsors informational programs throughout the school year. Topics have included parent effectiveness training, homework strategies, the annual school budget and its impact on special education, soccer leagues for special needs students, and collaboration in the IEP process.

The district has established a reading program in each of the elementary schools that has administrators from the district's secondary schools and central office visiting special education classes in the elementary schools and reading books to the children.

The district has assigned each building principal as the special education department chairperson for that school. This assignment has facilitated communication between parents and staff, and has improved services to students.

The district has a full time teacher of the hearing impaired who provides itinerant services to students. This instructor routinely consults with colleges to ensure smooth transitions for hearing impaired students.

One of the elementary schools in the district has a partnership with Montclair State University and is designated as a Professional Development School. This came as a result of a Character Education Program, which was funded through a Dodge Grant.

One of the elementary schools has received an “A+ for Kids Teacher Network” award from Channel 9. The school utilized this award to assist them in funding a creative drama program.

Monthly special education updates are circulated to each school that focus on professional development activities and workshops, community resources and programs, and newly acquired materials that are available for use by staff members.

The district has established a relationship with Jersey City University to provide professional development courses throughout the school year.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the procedural handbook for child study teams, disseminating information to parents regarding special education activities, and staff development. The district’s improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of occupational and physical therapies, and procedures to address transfer students. The district’s improvement plan will not sufficiently address the issue regarding related services staffing needs.

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

Areas of Need:

Provision of Occupational and Physical Therapies – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that therapies need to be provided by certified professionals and/or agencies in order to assure the timely delivery of services. The improvement plan does not identify how related services staff would be recruited, or how the services would be provided when staff are unavailable.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include methods for the recruitment of related services staff, and how services will be provided when additional staff members cannot be identified in a timely manner.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that notices needed to be reviewed and revised and that referral timelines were problematic. The improvement plan sufficiently addresses the notice issue.

The district also identified areas of need regarding native language issues. No improvement plan activities were included to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the age of majority, participants at meetings for preschoolers, and surrogate parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Timelines related to referrals - During the self-assessment process, the district identified that they needed to review the timelines for responses to requests for referrals to ensure they were in compliance with mandates. The improvement plan indicated that the district would review student folders to determine if timelines are being met.

During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records determined that when the child study team received referrals, the identification meeting was not conducted within the required 20-day time frame. Furthermore, referrals received in May and June were frequently not addressed until the following September.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure identification meetings are conducted within 20-days of receipt of a referral, including those referrals received during the summer. The plan must include an administrative oversight component such as the routine review of records already identified by the district.**

Native Language issues – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that notices needed to be provided to parents in their native language. They also identified that interpreters needed to be available for meetings. No improvement plan activities were submitted to address these areas of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that notices are available in the native languages of parents, when feasible, and that interpreters will participate in meetings, when required.**

Age of Majority – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through a review of the IEPs and interviews with the district staff that the district has been informing parents and students one year before the student turns 18 that all rights will transfer to the adult student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that students and parents are notified regarding the transfer of rights at least three years before the student reaches the age of majority. The plan will include the revision of the IEP to reflect this change in code requirements.**

Participants at meetings for preschool students – During the on-site monitoring visit, records of preschool students generated after September 2000 were reviewed. Based on this review it was determined that regular education teachers are not attending identification meetings or eligibility meetings for preschool-age students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that a regular education teacher, having knowledge of the student or the district's programs, will participate in meetings for preschool students.**

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site visit, interviews with the assistant superintendent indicated that the district has neither identified nor trained individuals to act as surrogate parents should the need arise.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that individuals will be identified to serve in the capacity of a surrogate parent should the need arise. The plan will include training activities for those individuals.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding PAC procedures and interventions in general education. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need. The district also identified that the school

nurse needed to be more actively involved in gathering medical information. Improvement plan activities will not sufficiently address this area of need.

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

Areas of Need:

Involvement of the School Nurse – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that the school nurse needed to be more actively involved in the gathering of medical information regarding students who are referred. However, the plan does not identify the activities or procedures necessary to ensure nurses are providing required information to team members prior to the identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that health summaries are provided to the teams and vision and hearing screenings are conducted whenever a student is referred to the child study team. The plan will include the manner in which these activities will be documented in the student file as well as the manner in which school nurses and team members will be informed of these procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

The district's self-assessment identified areas of need regarding timelines for evaluations and standardized tests. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need. The district also identified areas of need regarding functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, and ensuring that procedures for ESL evaluations were consistent with ESERS evaluation procedures. Improvement plan activities will not sufficiently address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding bilingual evaluations and components of written reports.

Areas of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that the process of conducting a functional assessment needed to be reviewed and revised if necessary. The improvement plan merely restates this area of need, rather than identifying how the process will be revised in the event an issue is identified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to identify the procedure the district will implement to determine whether their functional assessment procedures require revision. The procedures must include a mechanism to ensure any required revisions are completed in a timely manner and that**

teams receive appropriate in-service training regarding these revised procedures.

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that the procedure for the acceptance of reports from other agencies must be specified and documented. The improvement plan did not address the procedure required for rejecting reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to identify a procedure to ensure that when reports are rejected parents are provided with a written rationale regarding that rejection and documentation is maintained of the provision of that rationale.**

ESLS Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation procedures – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that evaluations and IEPs for ESLS students must be reviewed to determine if procedures and formats are consistent with those for ESERS students.

During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review that the district did not consistently include a statement regarding the educational impact of the speech problem for students determined ESLS.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that speech-language evaluations include written documentation from the student's teacher of the educational impact of the speech problem.**

Bilingual Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring visit, bilingual evaluation records were reviewed. A number of issues were identified including different dates of receipt of consent; evaluations being conducted before consent was obtained; delayed evaluations after consent had been obtained; evaluation plans not identifying the need for bilingual evaluations; and evaluations conducted in English even when the need had been identified for assessments in another language.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that bilingual evaluations are provided in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The plan will include an oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures on a consistent basis.**

Components of Written Reports - During the on-site visit, a review of student records for both ESERS students and ESLS students determined that written reports were not consistently dated.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written reports are dated.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district determined that reevaluation procedures needed to be reviewed and revised if necessary. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address this area of need because it does not identify the components of the reevaluation process that are problematic.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding reevaluation planning meetings, provision of notices of meetings and written notices, and meeting participants.

Area of Need:

Reevaluation Planning Meetings, Notices, and Participants – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records determined that the reevaluation planning meeting was not conducted on a consistent basis. When the meeting was held, some required participants were not in attendance. A further review of records determined that notices of meetings and written notices were not maintained in student files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure a reevaluation planning meeting is conducted for all students and that all required participants are in attendance. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure notices are provided and documented in the student file.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding eligibility procedures for ESLS students and the provision of copies of reports to parents. The district's improvement plan will not sufficiently address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the inclusion of eligibility statements in the ESLS evaluation reports and eligibility criteria.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech-language procedures for eligibility/Inclusion of eligibility statements in ESLS evaluation reports - During the self-assessment process, the district identified that speech language procedures for eligibility needed to be reviewed and revised.

During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records determined that while a meeting is conducted to determine whether a student is eligible for speech language services, the speech-language therapist had already determined eligibility by including an eligibility statement in the speech/language assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that eligibility determinations are made by a duly constituted team and not unilaterally by the speech-language therapist. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the eligibility statement is documented in an appropriate manner.**

Reports to Parents – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that copies of reports needed to be provided to parents. The district’s improvement plan indicated reports should be available to parents when necessary.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that copies of evaluation reports are provided to parents no later than the eligibility meeting, and that documentation of the provision of reports is maintained in the student file.**

Assignment of inappropriate eligibility criteria – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records determined that teams were assigning inappropriate eligibility categories, such as “written language,” to students who were determined eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEP teams utilize only those eligibility categories identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The plan must include an in-service component for team members and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent and appropriate application of these eligibility criteria.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified various areas of need related to staff and parent training; increasing parent and student involvement in the IEP process; annual review timelines; components, considerations and required statements; regular education teacher participation at IEP meetings; improving clerical support to child study teams; teacher access to IEPs; and providing copies of IEPs to parents in a timely manner. The district’s improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of notices of meetings.

Area of Need:

Provision of Notices of meetings – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records determined that though parents were informed of meetings, notices of meetings were not maintained in student files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that copies of notices are maintained in student files.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

The district's self-assessment indicated areas of need regarding a continuum of placement options; regular education access for special education students, including preschool disabled students; documentation of the individual decision-making process; and increasing in-district placements for preschoolers. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

Section X: Transition

A. Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that linkages needed to be established with Early Intervention Programs and other referring agencies in order to facilitate transition of preschool disabled students. The district's improvement plan will not sufficiently address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding implementation of IEPs by age three.

Area of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that linkages needed to be established with Early Intervention Programs and other referring agencies in order to facilitate transition of preschool disabled students.

Interviews with team members indicated that the district does participate in the

preschool transition planning conference. However, a review of records indicated the district does not maintain documentation of team members' participation in these meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it maintains documentation of attendance at preschool transition planning conferences.**

Implementation of IEPs by age three – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records of preschoolers determined that IEPs were not consistently implemented by the time the student reached age three, even when the teams received these referrals two to six months prior to the child's third birthday.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs of preschool students are implemented by age three. The plan will include a component to ensure documentation is maintained should extenuating circumstances delay implementation.**

B. Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with student invitation to and involvement in the IEP process, developing liaisons with agencies involved in post-school transition, and providing information to parents regarding post-school transition. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the identification of the district liaison to post-secondary resources.

Area of Need:

Identifying the district liaison - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of IEPs determined that the liaison to post-secondary resources has not been identified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs identify the district liaison to post-secondary resources.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding training for staff in the area of discipline. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the timely provision of notification to case managers.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of suspensions to case managers – During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews with child study team members indicated that while they are verbally informed of a student’s removal, written notification is often delayed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written documentation of suspensions is provided to case managers without delay.**

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need related to participation in statewide assessments by students placed in out-of-district programs; identification of an alternative assessment; a need to determine rationales for exemptions; and a need to review the SRA process for students with educational disabilities. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Areas of Needs:

Participation by Out-of-district students in Statewide Assessments – During self-assessment, the district identified a need to involve students placed in out-of-district programs in statewide and district assessment programs. The improvement plan does not identify how the district will do this.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include strategies and activities to ensure that students who are placed in out-of-district programs will be afforded the opportunity to participate in statewide and district-wide assessments.**

Rationale for exemption from Statewide Assessment – During self-assessment, the district identified a need to review the number of disabled students exempted from participating in statewide assessments and to develop a procedure for determining the rationale for exemption. The improvement plan does not include activities to address this need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure the rationale for exemption from participating in statewide**

assessments is determined on an individual basis and documented in the student's IEP.

Identification of an alternative assessment – The district self-assessment identified a need to identify and utilize an alternate assessment for disabled students who are exempted from participating in statewide assessments. The improvement plan does not include any activities to address this area of need.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs for students exempted from participating in statewide assessments identify participation in the state's alternate assessment.**

Involvement of students with disabilities in the SRA process - The district's self-assessment identified a need to involve students with disabilities in the SRA process when appropriate. The district also identified a need to review the SRA process and establish guidelines for its utilization with these students. The improvement plan does not identify how the district will do this.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure classified students have the opportunity to participate in the SRA process, when appropriate.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district noted that all disabled students, both in and out-of-district are given the opportunity to participate in high school graduation activities and that a very high percentage of classified students do graduate. The district identified a need to follow up on disabled students who did not graduate and to document the reasons for the failure to do so. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding graduation requirements in IEPs.

Area's of Need:

Specification of graduation requirements - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of the records indicated graduation requirements are not documented in IEPs on a consistent basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure IEPs include graduation requirements when those requirements are a necessary component of an IEP.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding consultation time, a need to relocate the preschool disabled program to further opportunities for inclusion, and a need to provide special education teachers with training in the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified that the procedure for maintaining student records needs to be reviewed. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the identification of location of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of other locations – During the on-site, a review of central files indicated the files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that cumulative records identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

Summary

This on-site monitoring visit was conducted in the Parsippany-Troy Hills Township School District from March 19-26, 2001 after a public focus group meeting. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development; related services; procedures for transfer students; native language issues; referral procedures; notice issues; acceptance and rejections of reports; providing parents with copies of evaluation reports; evaluation, eligibility and reevaluation procedures; IEP issues; regular education access and lack of a continuum of program options; individual decision-making regarding placement; discipline issues; statewide and alternate assessments; and consultation time for resource program teachers and regular education teachers.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards including age of majority; participants at meetings; surrogate parents; bilingual evaluations; components of written reports; reevaluation planning meetings; provision of notices of meetings and written notices; eligibility criteria; implementation of IEPs by age three; identifying the district liaison to post-secondary resources; documentation of suspensions to case managers; graduation requirements in IEPs; and documentation of the location of pupil records.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to revise its improvement plan to address the additional areas of need and to resubmit the plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.