

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

District: Manchester Regional High School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: January 27,28 and 29, 2003

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Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Manchester Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Manchester Regional High 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 Manchester Regional High 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 Manchester Regional High School on January 21,2003. 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 Careers Institute. This institute helps all students, including students with disabilities, select, prepare and find employment in careers of their choice. These programs provide work experience with trade associations, community based hospitals and companies. Students receive credit towards graduation

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for participation in these programs. Further, students are often employed by these organizations after successful internships and apprenticeships.

The district is also commended for their Renaissance Program. This program is a national education-focused program that recognizes and rewards the academic achievement of all students, their positive efforts towards improving grades and attendance as well as good citizenship. This program also rewards teachers who provide extraordinary supports for student achievement. These rewards can be redeemed within the community businesses and school.

The district also provides advanced technology programs for all students, including students with disabilities, that include the Business computer lab and upgrades of computers in the classrooms. The school has introduced additional courses in technology, on-line learning programs and computerized attendance and grading systems for teacher use.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, IEP, Transition, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional/parent development. **No improvement plan was submitted to address this area of need. The district needs to submit an improvement plan that includes procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

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, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students and certifications.

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

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

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents and identification meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Surrogate Parents - During the on-site visit, interviews indicated that the district has not developed procedures for the selection and training of surrogate parents in the event one is needed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it has the ability to select and train surrogate parents in the event one is needed.**

Identification Meetings - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that consent was being obtained to screen students to determine the need for a full Child Study Team evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts an identification meeting with required participants to review available data to determine the need for an evaluation. In the event the members who participated in the identification meeting determine an evaluation is warranted, notice will be provided to the parent and consent will be obtained to conduct that evaluation. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and summer referrals.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding referral process/pre-referral interventions, identification meeting timelines and participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Referral Process/Pre-referral Interventions - During the on-site monitoring, interviews indicated that although staff indicated they were implementing prereferral interventions

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and strategies prior to referral to the child study team, this could not be confirmed through record review.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure pre-referral interventions are documented in the student record. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Identification Meeting Timelines and Participants - During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated identification meetings are not consistently conducted within twenty days of receipt of a referral. Additionally, when they are conducted, the full child study team is not in attendance. Furthermore, a review of referrals indicated a significant lapse between the date the referral was generated and the date it was stamped as received by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure twenty day timelines are met, all required participants attend these meetings, and referrals are date stamped the day they are received. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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 evaluations and bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and the provision of copies of evaluations to parents ten days prior to meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Standardized Assessments - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that learning evaluations are being conducted with assessment tools that have since been revised. As such, these tools are no longer valid.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it purchases the most current editions of standardized assessments to ensure the validity of its learning evaluations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that functional assessments were not being conducted by child study team members even though they are included in the nature and scope of the evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments are conducted as part of the evaluation process. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Written Reports - During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that Child Study Team reports were not consistently signed and dated nor were they provided to parents ten days prior to meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all written assessment reports are signed and dated and copies are provided to parents at least ten days prior to eligibility meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech language services. **No improvement plan was submitted to address these areas of need. The district needs to submit an improvement plan that includes procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement/disagreement and district procedures for specific learning disability classification.

Area(s) of Need:

Agreement/disagreement rationale - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that meeting participants are not documenting their agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations after the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all meeting participants document their agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Specific Learning Disability Criteria - During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the district has not adopted a statistical formula to determine eligibility under the specific learning disabilities criteria.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to adopt a statistical formula to determine eligibility under the SLD criteria. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation and continuum.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area of considerations and required statements.

Area(s) of Need:

Considerations and Required Statements – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated the district's least restrictive environment statement does not include the required components identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(d) 3, 4.

- **The district will revise its IEP format to ensure the least restrictive environment statements contain all required considerations and statements. It is recommended the district adopt the model IEP developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, choice of diploma and out-of-district participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area of written notice of graduation.

Area(s) of Need:

Written notice of graduation - During the on-site visit, interviews and a review of records indicated that the district is not providing written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided and documented in the student files. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access request, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area of documentation of other locations of student records.

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Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations- During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure central files identify the locations of other student records maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Manchester Regional High School District on January 27, 28 and 29, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify most 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents also expressed that the child study team, teachers and administrators came together for their children. Some parents indicated that their children had become much more positive about their education since receiving services within the school. One parent did express concerns regarding implementation of IEPs. Parents would like to see more communication between the elementary and secondary programs.

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, extended school year, related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary and bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation, eligibility meetings and participants, IEP, individualized decision making, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, transition, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral analysis, behavior intervention plans and manifestation determinations, statewide assessments, graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, programs and services, access request, access sheets, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, facilities, criteria and documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech/language services, Interim Alternative Educational Settings and procedural safeguards for discipline.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding surrogate parents, identification meetings, referral process, prereferral interventions, identification meeting timelines and participants, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting, agreement/disagreement rationale, specific learning disability criteria, considerations and required statements, written notice of graduation and documentation of other locations.

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