

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

District: Pequannock School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: May 4 and 6, 2004

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Pequannock School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pequannock 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 Pequannock 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.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Stephen J. Gerace Elementary School on April 29, 2004. 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 implementing an autistic program within the district for the 2003-2004 school year. This program has allowed out-of-district students to return to the district and be integrated with their non-disabled peers during specially scheduled activities. This program utilizes the Applied Verbal Analysis approach which encourages children to interact with their environment. Occupational, speech and physical therapy are infused into the program.

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The district is further commended for the Satellite Program. This program is an alternate educational program for classified students in the high school setting. It incorporates all four levels of the high school, permits electives and allows the students to infuse community service into their program for credit hours.

The district is also commended for recently developing links with Chilton Memorial Hospital for the purposes of career exploration. Students from the 11th and 10th grades have had the opportunity to shadow individual employees of the hospital for one full day. The district and the hospital plan to continue to pursue additional educational opportunities and potential occupational careers in the future.

The district is further commended for working collaboratively with the Pequannock Parents of Exceptional Children. The PPEC, in conjunction with the Pequannock Department of Special Services, provides training and support to parents of students with disabilities.

Data Summary:

The district is commended for its successful efforts in placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Based on a review of district data, it was identified that of the nearly 350 classified students in the district, over 60% of them are educated with their non-disabled peers more than 80% of the school day. This percentage exceeds the state average of 41.6%.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the district's percentage of out-of-district students was 10.6%. For the 2003-2004 school year, the district has been able to bring several students back from their private placements to be educated within the district when it developed its autistic program. This has resulted in a reduction of over two percentage points (8%), which is lower than the state average. The district plans to continue the expansion of programs to educate special education students within the district.

The district reported a classification rate of 12.2% for the 2002-2003 school year and 11.98% for the 2003-2004 school year; both of which are lower than the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Transition to Pre-School, Statewide Assessments, Graduation Requirements 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 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 area of staff training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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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, frequency, duration and location of related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures to inform students about extracurricular and nonacademic activities and procedures to identify when students are not receiving related services as mandated in their IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 areas of consent, notices of meetings, meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parent selection and training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 referral process, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings, participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral interventions and health summary. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district has begun to implement activities to bring these areas into compliance.

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

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, components of written reports and bilingual evaluations.

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

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

Section VI: Re-evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of re-evaluation planning meetings, participants at planning meetings and re-evaluation for students turning age 5 by June 30.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of re-evaluation timelines due to insufficient 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 VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, signatures of agreement or disagreement and documentation of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services and provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to eligibility meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Eligibility for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services - During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that specific eligibility determinations are included in speech and language reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that eligibility determinations are not included in speech and language evaluation reports. Implementation of these activities will ensure that eligibility determinations are made by a properly configured IEP team at an eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Provision of Evaluation Reports to Parents – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that copies of evaluation reports are not being provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meetings. As a result, parents may not be prepared to discuss eligibility issues at the eligibility conference or to have other individuals in attendance at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents have the opportunity to be better prepared to discuss issues related to eligibility as well as have the opportunity to invite other individuals to the meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, provision of IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines and teacher access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants from vocational schools, teacher responsibility, considerations of modifications for participation in extracurricular activities and goals and objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of out-of-district student participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities and consideration of general education option as the first placement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency invitation, individual assessments for post-secondary outcomes, age 14

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transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, student interests, reconvening meetings when agencies cannot attend and links to community resources. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination and procedural safeguards

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of interim alternate educational settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 sizes, age ranges, group sizes for speech, home instruction and consultation time.

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

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pequannock School District on April 5 and 6, 2004. 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 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.

The district is commended for its inclusive practices which have resulted in a significant number of special education students being educated in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day for school aged students.

At a focus group meeting conducted prior to the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Additionally, parents commented on the accessibility of team members and teachers. However, some parents are displeased with the difficulty of scheduling meetings and the level of transition services at the high school. In addition, although all parents indicated that they are very involved in the IEP process, some parents indicated that they are not made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

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 and year, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, transfer procedures, facilities, certifications, consent, meetings, notices of meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, identification meetings, timelines and participants, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings, required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, provision of IEP to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access, regular education access, continuum of programs, preschool transition conference, Early Intervention to pre-school disabled by age 3, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, IEP graduation requirements, out-of-district participation, written notice of graduation, class size, age range, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, procedures to inform students about extracurricular and nonacademic activities, procedures to identify when students are not receiving related services as mandated in their IEPs, surrogate parents, Child Find, pre-referral interventions, health summary,

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acceptance and rejection of reports, re-evaluation timelines, criteria, IEP participants from vocational settings, teacher responsibility, considerations for modifications for participation in extracurricular activities, goals and objectives for related services, out-of-district student knowledge of extracurricular and nonacademic activities, consideration of general education option as first placement, agency invitation, individual assessments for post-secondary outcomes, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, student interests, reconvening meetings when agencies cannot attend, links to community resources, interim alternate educational settings, and class descriptions.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding statement of eligibility in written reports for students eligible for speech and language services and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents.

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