

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

District: Perth Amboy

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: February 26 – March 2, 2001

Monitoring Team: Debbie Masarsky, Stephen A. Coplin, Barbara Tucker and Peggy McDonald

Background Information:

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Perth Amboy School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. The self-assessment included the collection of data and information from various sources within the district to determine if the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. As the first step in the self-assessment process, parents, staff and members of the community were invited to attend a public focus group meeting.

A steering committee comprised of administrators, educators, related service providers, students, parents and community representatives was established to review information. Based on the information collected by the district, a report of findings was developed identifying areas of strength and areas that need improvement. The Perth Amboy School District developed an improvement plan to address the areas of need identified by the district that included activities for compliance and/or improvement and oversight components.

A second public focus group meeting was held in the district on February 15, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents expressed positive comments about various programs and services within the district, specifically about child study team members and transition services.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring visit from February 26, 2001 to March 2, 2001, to review the issues identified and to address the appropriateness of the improvement plan as well as the progress made in implementing the plan. During the on-site monitoring visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documentation including policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, and related service providers, as well as a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's director and supervisor of special education, building principals and vice principals, mainstream facilitator, employment orientation teacher, guidance counselors, child study team members, speech and language specialists, special education teachers, crisis teachers and regular education teachers. Telephone interviews with parents of students with disabilities were also conducted. Additionally, district schools and a representative sample of special education and in-class support classes were visited. District compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey Administrative Code for Special Education (N.J.A.C. 6A:14) was assessed.

District Strengths

The district employs a mainstream facilitator whose primary responsibility is to afford students with disabilities every opportunity to succeed in a general education setting when they transition from the elementary level to the secondary level.

At the middle and high schools there are crisis teachers whose primary responsibility is to provide support for students with disabilities whose temporary inability to cope within their current school environment interferes with effective learning.

A Special Education Curriculum Specialist works directly with classroom teachers and child study teams to enhance the delivery of academic services to students with disabilities. Additionally, she has assisted teachers in the alignment of instruction to the Core Curriculum Content Standards with the appropriate use of accommodations/modifications.

The district has a special education parent liaison who is responsible for the development of a program for parents of children with disabilities to promote a positive home/school relationship. This liaison maintains ongoing contact and communication with parents of children with disabilities, child study team members, special education teachers, and administrators to promote home/school involvement.

Two community agents are currently assigned to the department of special services to make home visits, to provide transport services and to schedule medical appointments.

The district's Employment Orientation Program for students in grades 2-8 exposes students to a simulated work environment. The program allows the student with disabilities to experience success through vocational activities when they have not been successful in the academic arena. This program helps students identify interests and aptitudes that can lead to successful integration in other vocational programs and/or the work environment.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance in All Standards

Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the self-assessment process and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site monitoring visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to develop special education procedures, to provide staff development programs, and to provide professional development opportunities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the procedures issue.

Area(s) of Need:

Code Changes-The district identified the need to apprise district personnel of changes and/or revisions to special education code and to ensure this information is presented in a uniform manner. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures for the dissemination of information regarding changes and/or revisions to the special education code to district personnel in a uniform manner. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the procedures.

Staff Development-The district identified the need to provide training to general education staff regarding students with disabilities in general education, the general educator's role in IEP meetings, the adaptation of Core Curriculum Content Standards for students with disabilities, the utilization of behavioral supports and interventions and teaching trends which integrate traditional general education and special education theories and strategies. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include a mechanism that identifies the anticipated outcomes of staff development training as well as a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.

Section II: FAPE

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transportation, input into building construction projects, and procedures regarding transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

The district also identified the need to expand the availability of counseling. This area was not sufficiently addressed in the improvement plan.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the length of the school day for pre-school students with disabilities.

Areas of Need:

Counseling-The district identified the need to expand their counseling services. In addition, during the on-site monitoring it was determined that at the high school level, goals and objectives for counseling are not consistently included in IEPs. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the district provides programs and services that are based on the individual needs of

students and not on the availability of staff. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the district has sufficient staff to provide these programs and services.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure counseling goals and objectives are developed and documented in all IEPs for students receiving counseling as a related service.

Length of School Day- During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined that the length of the school day for pre-school students with disabilities is not as long as that established for the district's non-disabled pre-school students. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the length of the school day for pre-school students with disabilities is at least as long as that established for the district's non-disabled students.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents and procedural safeguard rights for identified students.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding notice of a meeting, written notice and notice timelines.

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents-The district has identified the need to inform district personnel of the procedures regarding surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the revised procedures.

Procedural Safeguards-The district identified the need to apprise staff of the procedural safeguard rights of identified students. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identified students are afforded procedural safeguards and protections under the disciplinary requirements of 6A:14-3.3(f). The improvement plan must also include an oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these procedures.

Notice of a Meeting/Written Notice- During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through interviews and record review, that the district's notices do not

contain the required statements and components. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure its notices contain all required components. It is recommended that the district use the forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Invitation of a Meeting to Student- During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide a written invitation to students beginning at the age 14 or younger if appropriate, when the purpose of a meeting is to discuss transition. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this issue.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the provision and documentation of an invitation to a student age 14 or younger if appropriate, when the purpose of the meeting is to discuss transition.

Notice Timelines- During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district inconsistently provides written notice within 15 days. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure written notice is provided within 15 days of a meeting and that the provision is consistently documented in student files.

Section IV: Location, Referral & Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding the expansion of intervention options, staff training, and direct parental referral procedures. Components of notice have been addressed in Section III of this document.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

Area(s) of Need:

Pre-referral Interventions-The district has identified the need for PAC/I&RS to expand the available options for intervention within the school setting and to provide in-service training regarding the requirements of PAC/I&RS. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to expand range of general education interventions. The plan must include a training component and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training to ensure compliance with these procedures.

Referral Procedures/20-day Timeline- The district has identified in the self-assessment document the need to apprise district staff of direct parental referral procedures with

particular attention to the 20-day timeline for convening an identification meeting. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the identification meeting is held within 20 days of receipt of any request for an initial evaluation. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.

Child Find Activities- During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and document review that the district does not conduct Child Find outreach activities for migrant or homeless students who are potentially disabled. In addition, it was determined that the district's Child Find outreach activities are not conducted throughout the year.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to expand their Child Find outreach activities to include migrant and homeless students who are potentially disabled. The plan must also ensure the district's Child Find outreach activities are conducted throughout the year.

Section V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding functional components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding screening and evaluation components for speech-language evaluations.

Area(s) of Need:

Evaluation Procedures- The district has identified the need for child study team members to balance standardized testing with functional components as a regular part of the evaluation process. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the inclusion of functional assessments as a part of the evaluation process as required in NJAC 6A:14-3.4(d)1,2.

Screening- During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that screenings, not assessments, are being conducted by the speech/language specialist when a speech problem is identified by the child study team during the initial evaluation process. These screenings are not included in the notice of the evaluation and, as a result, parental consent does not include this activity.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure all areas of suspected disability appropriately identified and evaluated during the evaluation

process. The plan must ensure parental consent is obtained prior to conducting these assessments.

Initial Speech and Language Evaluations- During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that initial evaluations for students classified “eligible for speech-language services” did not include all required functional assessment components.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that initial speech-language evaluations for students referred for speech or language problems include all of the required functional components identified in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)1, 2.

Section VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding the reevaluation database. Components of notice have been addressed in Section III of this document.

Areas of Need:

Reevaluation Records/Timelines- The district has identified the need for child study team members and office staff to update re-evaluation records and for transfer students to be added to the re-evaluation database. The district’s improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures that ensure all reevaluation planning meetings are held early enough to complete re-evaluations within the required timelines. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district identified in the self-assessment document areas of need regarding eligibility meetings, the criteria for determining eligibility, and the need for child study team members and speech/language specialists to work collaboratively. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the on-site monitoring visit, an additional area of need was identified regarding documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents.

Areas of Need:

Evaluation Reports- During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and interviews that the provision of evaluation reports to parents was inconsistent. The district’s improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the consistent provision of evaluation reports to parents no later than when it provides notice of the student's eligibility.

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to develop, coordinate, and discuss related service schedules. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

The district also identified the need for collaboration between the district team members and with vo-tech staff, and the need to implement the new IEP format.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding evaluation criteria for goals and objectives in IEPs.

Areas of Need:

Collaborative Determinations-The district has identified the need for collaboration with vo-tech staff in the development of IEPs for shared-time students. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to invite vo-tech staff to IEP meetings of shared-time students to ensure the IEP is developed using information obtained from individuals who are knowledgeable about the student.

IEP Revisions-The district has identified the need for child study team members to more rapidly implement the newly formatted IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently meet this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to ensure staff are provided with the necessary information to implement the revised IEP format in an appropriate manner.

Statement of Measurable Goals-During the on-site monitoring, a review of pupil records indicated teams are developing goals and objectives that are not measurable. Additionally, a review of IEPs indicated an evaluation criteria to determine progress toward meeting goals and objectives was not identified.

- The district is directed to ensure that IEP teams develop measurable goals and objectives as well as identify an evaluation criteria to determine progress in achieving the goals and objectives.

Section IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to train general education staff in the understanding and use of supplementary aids and services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section X. Transition to Preschool

A. EIP to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding outreach for preschool students. The plan is insufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the need to facilitate a smooth transition from early intervention programs to preschool.

Area(s) of Need:

Outreach for Preschool Students-During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to conduct outreach activities for preschool students 120 days prior to the third birthday. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that members of the district's preschool child study team conduct outreach activities throughout the year to ensure eligible students receive services by their third birthday.

Participation in the Transition Planning Conference-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that district child study team members do not participate in the transition planning conference or consult with the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) prior to the transition planning conference.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to help facilitate the participation of a team member at the transition planning conference. To help facilitate this attendance the improvement plan must include a component to ensure that clear lines of communication exists between early intervention and district staff. Additionally, the district must develop procedures to ensure that contact, participation and consultation with DHSS is documented in students' records.

B. Transition from School to Post-school

Summary of Findings:

Although the district has begun to systemically address transition concerns in students' IEPs, during the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the development of goals and objectives, the need to provide employment exploration options, and the need to develop activities/programs to address and reduce the dropout rate. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding consideration of student's interests and preferences, notification to parent, identification of post secondary resource liaison, agency failure to provide transition services, agency failure to attend IEP meetings and invitations to students and agencies. Notification and student invitation issues were addressed in Section III.

Area(s) of Need:

Consideration of Student's Interests and Preferences-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that guidance counselors often assess students' interests and preferences, however this information is not consistently documented in the students' IEPs. Furthermore, students' desired post-secondary outcomes, along with their preferences and interests, are not discussed at the IEP meetings in a manner that would ensure the IEP process is outcome-oriented.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students' desired post-secondary outcomes, along with their preferences and interests are discussed at the beginning of the IEP meeting to ensure the IEP process is outcome-oriented. Additionally, the improvement plan must include a component to document interests and preferences to ensure these issues are considered during the IEP process.

Identification of Post Secondary Resource Liaison-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district needs to identify in the IEP the person(s) responsible to serve as a liaison to post-secondary resources and to make referrals to these resources as appropriate. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to ensure the liaison to post-secondary resources is identified in the IEP.

Agency Failure to Provide Transition Services-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not have a procedure to follow when an outside agency fails to provide agreed upon transition services.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the provision of services when an outside agency fails to provide them.

Agency Failure to Attend IEP Meeting-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not have procedures to ensure the participation of agencies in transition planning when a representative fails to attend the meeting.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district takes other steps to obtain the participation of the other agency in the planning of any transition services.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary Of Findings:

The district's self-assessment identified the need to conduct manifestation determination meetings when appropriate. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district also identified the need for more inclusive alternate placements and the need to inform staff of factors that may link a student's behavior to the stated disability.

Areas of Need:

Alternative Placements-The district identified the need to develop alternative placements that are more inclusive when classified students are removed for disciplinary reasons. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district must revise its improvement plan to include the procedures it will follow to develop and implement more inclusive, alternate placement options for students with disabilities.

General Education Training-The district identified the need to provide information to general education staff regarding the link between student behavior and the student's stated disability. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district must revise its improvement plan to include in-service training to general education staff regarding the nexus between student behavior and the student's stated disability. The plan must include a component to determine the effectiveness of the training program.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding participation in graduation ceremonies, graduation requirements in IEPs and written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Participation in Graduation-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not document its efforts to inform students placed in out-of-district programs of their right to participate in the district's graduation ceremonies.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students placed in out-of-district programs are informed of their right to participate in the district's graduation ceremonies and that this is documented in the IEP.

Graduation Requirements-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that the district does not address graduation requirements in the IEP. The district's improvement plan does not sufficiently address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise the IEP format to include graduation requirements.

Written Notice of Graduation-During the on-site monitoring visit, it was identified that the district does not consistently document the provision of notice of graduation.

- The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to ensure it documents provision of written notice and a copy of the procedural safeguards statement prior to graduation.

Section XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need to revise its policies and procedures regarding student records and to discuss the procedures with district personnel. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

SUMMARY

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Perth Amboy School District on February 26 through March 2, 2001. 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. As a result of the thorough and comprehensive review conducted by the district during the self-assessment process, the district was able to self-identify a number of areas that require improvement. Furthermore, the district was able to develop an improvement plan that, with revisions, will be sufficient to correct the identified areas of need.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring, parents expressed positive comments about the district's programs, child study team members, and transition services.

The on-site monitoring process identified a number of district strengths that include a mainstream facilitator, crisis teachers, a special education curriculum specialist, a parent liaison, and community agents. Additionally, the district offers an employment orientation program for students in grades two through eight.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, related services, timelines, evaluation procedures, eligibility, the IEP format and discipline.

In addition to these self-identified areas, the on-site monitoring identified areas of need regarding length of school day for pre-school students, notice issues, child find activities, functional assessments, goals and objectives, and pre-school and secondary transition services. Documentation issues were also identified.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of this monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit its improvement plan to the Office of Special Education.