

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Phillipsburg

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: November 19, 20 and 21, 2003

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

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Phillipsburg School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Phillipsburg 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 Phillipsburg 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 Phillipsburg Middle School on November 12, 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 school 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 charter school's special education administrators, building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its full day inclusionary preschool and kindergarten both in district schools and in local provider programs. These programs ensure that preschool students are educated with their non-disabled peers and have the necessary supports and related services to be successful in the general education setting.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district is also commended for its participation in the Student Help and Referral Program (SHARP) which is an interdisciplinary system that provides support, information and intervention strategies as they relate to the educational and developmental needs of students.

The district is further commended for its additional transition program for special education students entering the high school from the middle school. This program was designed to address the high school drop out rate. A full day program is provided to acclimate middle school students not only to the new building but also to the opportunities and responsibilities that are a part of being a high school student. These are presented in an entertaining manner such as presenting the dress code as a fashion show of what is currently being worn and the discipline policies presented through skits acted out by the student council.

Additional strengths are the School Based Youth Services Program at the high school which provides counseling, homework help, snacks and recreation opportunities for high school students. A similar program, REACH, is in place at the middle school.

Seniors at the high school may take advantage of college level courses at the Warren County Community College for credit. Students may also choose to stay a fifth year to get vocational training at Warren Vocational Technical School.

Data Summary:

The Phillipsburg School District reported a classification rate of 17.8% which is higher than the state average of 13.4%. The district has included activities to reduce the classification rate in the improvement plan. The district's status as an Abbott district has enabled it to give regular education access to over 90% of preschool disabled students by placement in general education settings with their non-disabled peers. The district is near the state average in the number of students age 6-21 placed in general education over 80% of the day. However, the need to increase this access to general education was identified by the district as a concern. The district is moving in the direction of increased access to general education placement as its data indicated that there was a 14.8% increase over the data reported for the previous year in this category.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Eligibility, Statewide Assessment, 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 and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training in inclusive practices and instructional strategies and modifications. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. An additional concern was identified regarding parent training. The district has designed, sent and compiled results

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

from an interest survey for special education parents and has the first training scheduled for December, 2003.

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 day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP goals and objectives that are not specific enough and do not address all identified needs. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. An additional area of concern was identified regarding a lack of administrator's knowledge of special education student transfer procedures. Activities have been completed by the district to bring this knowledge of transfer procedures and paperwork to district administrators.

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, content and provision of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notice, meetings, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents, notices in native language and written notice in native language. The district has updated its written surrogate parent policy and it will be submitted to the board of education for approval at the next meeting. All district notices and the IEP have been translated into Spanish. Written notice is being translated by staff at the conclusion of meetings where the IEP is not used as written notice.

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 Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consistent documentation of implementation and effectiveness of interventions. The district's plan is sufficient to address these needs.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance or rejections of reports. The district has implemented activities to bring this area into compliance.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates and ninety-day timelines, provision of the IEP to parents and teacher access and knowledge.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of considerations and required statements as relates to progress reporting to parents. The district's plan is sufficient to address this need.

An additional area need was identified during the on-site visit regarding annual reviews.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Review of IEPs – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that nearly all annual reviews are conducted during the last three months of the school year. Though the IEP includes the program that will be implemented in September, it does not include a program that will be in effect from the date of the annual review to the end of the current school year. As a result, these students do not have a valid IEP in place for the last three months of the school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that annual reviews of IEPs include the program and services the students will receive through the end of the school year as well as the program and services for the coming school year. Implementation of these activities will ensure there is a valid IEP in place and that there is no lapse in the provision of programs and services.**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the decision making process, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation of supplementary aids and services, continuum and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of nonacademic and extracurricular notification and participation. The district has developed and begun implementation of activities and has written a letter to be sent to all out-of-district students to address this need.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency involvement, and student and agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests and post-secondary activities and linkages to outside agencies. The district's plan is sufficient to address these needs.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and placement in program by age three.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation to the case manager of suspensions. The district has in-serviced staff, distributed and implemented forms and procedures to bring this area of need into compliance.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction and consultation time.

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

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Phillipsburg School District on November 19, 20 and 21, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The 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 all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for prompt implementation of corrective action to address these areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were 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 and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. Concerns were expressed by a parent regarding a perceived undo delay in having his child classified.

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, extended school year, related services, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notices, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement and rationale, provision of a copy of evaluations to the parents ten days prior to the meeting, IEP meeting and participants, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core content curriculum standards, age of majority, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, provision of IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, continuum, age sixteen needed transition services, student and agency invitations, preschool transition planning conference, placement in program by age three, procedural safeguards, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding parent and staff development, transfer students, surrogate parents, notices and written notice in native language, pre-referral interventions, considerations and required statements, specific goals and objectives and progress reports, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, age fourteen transition service needs, agency involvement,

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

preferences and interests, documentation to case manager and special class descriptions.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding annual review dates.

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