

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

**District:** Pinelands Regional School District                      **County:** Ocean

**Monitoring Dates:** May 6 and 7, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Georgianna Parlacoski, Barbara J. Tucker and Stephen A. Coplin

***Background Information:***

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Pinelands Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pinelands Regional 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 Pinelands Regional School District developed an improvement plan to address their 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 on April 17, 2002. 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, and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The following unique programs are offered by the district to promote positive experiences for disabled as well as non-disabled students:

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**After-School Enrichment Program** – The objective of this program is to provide students with a variety of enrichment programs within a safe and structured environment. This program affords students the opportunity to manage schoolwork as well as to expand their knowledge in various areas of interest.

**School Based Youth Services** – This program provides courses in teen parenting and tutoring. Also available within this service is a one-stop program for employment, counseling, recreation and medical services.

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** – The district has a specialist from DVR to assist in planning and preparing transition services with special education students. The DVR specialist helps parents, students and case managers to monitor transition needs of students.

### ***Section I: General Provisions***

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Policy and Procedures and disseminations of IDEA information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional area of need was 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 frequency, duration and location of related services, length of school day, transfer students, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding adaptive physical education, monitoring of IEPs, provision of related services, and goals and objectives for related services. 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 extended school year.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that although extended school year is considered for the most severely disabled students, it is not consistently considered and discussed for all students at annual review meetings.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is considered and discussed for all students at each annual review meeting and that all relevant factors are documented in each IEP. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding all timelines, all meeting participants, and notice of a meeting. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an oversight mechanism to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified concerns regarding components of written notice. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional area of need was 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 parent referrals and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding pre-referral interventions, vision and hearing screenings, and staff referrals. 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 monitoring visit regarding child find activities.

**Areas of Need:**

**Child Find Activities** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that although Child Find information is distributed throughout the community for ages 3-21, the district’s Child Find activities do not address migrant and homeless students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child find activities include migrant and homeless students.**

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**Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding functional assessments, components of written reports, acceptance/rejection of reports and valid and reliable standardized tests. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of conducting reevaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding reevaluation for changes in eligibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section VII: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conducting eligibility meetings, provision of reports to parents, and eligibility criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding components for the statement of eligibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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**Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of teacher access to the individualized education program (IEP) documents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP implementation dates for student eligible for speech and language services, IEP components, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS), and teacher responsibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of continuum of programs and individualized decision-making process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding supplementary aides and services, general education access, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular participation, required statements and considerations, and out-of-district participation. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section X: Transition – Transition from School to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding statement of transition services needs, statement of needed transition services, student/agency participation and agency involvement. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting (IAES), and safeguards for potentially disabled students. 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 monitoring visit regarding functional behavioral assessment.

**Areas of Need:**

**Functional Behavioral Assessment** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that since case managers are inconsistently provided with written notification at the time of suspension, teams are not consistently able to develop functional behavioral assessment plans, conduct functional behavior assessments and/ or develop behavior intervention plans, when needed.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notifications of suspensions are provided to case managers at the time any removal from program is being considered. The plan should include a mechanism to ensure that, if necessary, members of the IEP team meet to develop a functional behavior assessment plan, ensure the plan is implemented, and consider the results when developing the behavior intervention plan. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the revised procedures.**

**Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in statewide assessment and accommodations and modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding alternate proficiency assessment (APA) and special review assessment (SRA). The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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### **Section XIII: Graduation**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding notice of graduation.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Notice of Graduation** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not provide notice of graduation to parents or adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents/adult students are provided with notice of graduation and that this provision is documented in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

### **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of home instruction, class sizes and age range waivers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding insufficient staffing, group sizes, and teacher collaboration. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

### **Section XV: Student Records**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and maintenance destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding access to records. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the documentation of other locations.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Documentation of Records in Other Locations** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that the district does not identify the location of other records in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records maintained by the district is identified in the central file.**



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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pinelands Regional School District on May 6 and 7, 2002. 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 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. The district is further 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.

Approximately five parents attended a focus group meeting held on April 17, 2002. Parents expressed concerns regarding the frequency of student suspensions, the length of time students are suspended, limited interaction with case managers, implementation of IEP accommodations and student placement determined by budget constraints. These areas were identified by the district during the self-assessment process and improvement plans have been developed and board approved.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policy and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, frequency, duration and location of related services, length of school day, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, native language, independent evaluations, parent referrals, identification meetings, multi-disciplinary assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluations, eligibility meetings, provision of reports to parents, eligibility criteria, teacher access, continuum of programs, individualized decision-making, suspension tracking, participation in statewide assessment, accommodations and modifications, choice of diploma, out-of-district participation, home instruction, class sizes, age ranges, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, adaptive physical education, monitoring of IEPs, provision of related services, goals and objectives of related services, timelines, notice of a meeting, components of written notice, pre-referral interventions, vision/hearing screening, staff referrals, regarding functional assessments, components of written reports, accept/rejection of reports, valid and reliable standardized tests, meeting participants, reevaluation for change in eligibility, components for the statement of eligibility, IEP implementation dates for students eligible for speech/language services, IEP components, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, teacher responsibility, supplementary aides and services, general education access, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular participation, individualized decision-making process, required statements and considerations, out-of-district participation, statement of transition services needs, statement of needed transition services, student/agency participation, agency involvement, behavioral interventions plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, potentially disabled, alternate proficiency assessment, special review assessment, insufficient staff, group sizes, teacher collaboration and access to records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, child find activities, functional behavior assessments, notice of graduation and documentation of other locations.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Pinelands Regional School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.