

**THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION MONITORING**

District: Pine Hill Borough School District **County:** Camden

Monitoring Dates: June 1 and 2, 2004

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Caryl Carthew, Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2002 - 2003 school years, the Pine Hill Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pine Hill Borough School District with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free and 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 Pine Hill Borough School District developed an improvement plan to address the 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 Pine Hill Borough Middle School on February 26, 2004. Information obtained from the meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documentation, 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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Pine Hill Borough School District is commended for providing a wide variety of programs to assist all students, including students with disabilities, that are made possible through the efforts of the Pine Hill Educational Foundation. This organization,

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

made up of school administrators, teachers, parents and community members, works to raise additional funds to supplement existing educational programs. The foundation has enabled the district to establish linkages with local social service agencies, increasing the availability of community resources for students. In addition, the foundation has provided all teachers with computers to be utilized in the classroom for instruction, including wireless technology at the middle school. The foundation has also funded monthly parent workshops on a variety of socially and academically relevant topics.

The district is further commended for the variety of programs established to foster academic growth and enhance the positive and peaceful school climate. At the Dr. Albert M. Bean Elementary School, first and second grade teachers meet in study groups once a month, with the principal and reading specialist, to identify strategies for improving student reading comprehension. They have implemented several new programs as a result of these study groups, including Mosaic of Thoughts and Reading with Meaning. The Pine Hill Borough Middle School teachers and students have established the Panther Peacemakers: No More Bullies, which is designed to enhance social skills and improve peer interaction. This group meets before school, during lunch, and after school to discuss strategies for eliminating student bullying. Overbrook High School has also adopted the Renaissance program which recognizes academic achievement, good attendance and positive behavior. Small group counseling is also available at the high school during lunch periods or after school. Participation in these sessions is voluntary, and topics of discussion range from academic issues, including test preparation, to emotional issues, such as anger management.

Part One Data Summary:

The data submitted by the Pine Hill Borough School District indicated it has a classification rate of 22.1%. A review of placement data indicates 46.7% of the students are placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. This is slightly higher than the state average of 41.6%. Though the district has developed improvement plan activities to address these areas, a review of those activities indicates they are insufficient to remove the barriers. As such, they must be revised in accordance with the directives contained in this report.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with all Standards:

General Provisions and **Graduation** 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 II. Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day and year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives for all identified special education needs, related services, transfer procedures and implementing program changes prior to convening an IEP meeting. **The**

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

district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure that the provision of services is accurately reflected in IEPs, that goals and objectives are included in IEPs, that transfer procedures are followed and that IEP meetings are convened and written notice provided prior to implementing any changes to a student's program. In addition, timelines for addressing goals and objectives have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and group size.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year– During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that extended school year services are not consistently considered for all students. In addition, for those students who do receive extended school year, a description of the program and goals and objectives are not consistently included in IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure extended school year is considered for all students and that when services are required that the IEP includes a description of the program and goals and objectives. The implementation of these activities will ensure issues related to regression/recoupment are considered and addressed through the provision of appropriate programs and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Group size for Counseling – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that group size for counseling services is identified in the IEP as “group and/or individual” – it does not identify the size of the group.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the group size for counseling services is identified in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive this related service in the manner in which the members of the IEP team agreed would be appropriate to address the identified needs of the student. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, provision of interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notice of a meeting and inclusion of the purpose of the meeting when transition activities will be discussed. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding surrogate parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because the timelines identified for completion of activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly identified dates.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting, written notice and native language

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a Meeting/Written Notice – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review that notice of a meeting does not inform parents of their right to invite others to the meeting and the various written notices do not include all required components.

- **The district will revise its notices to ensure they contain all required components. It is recommended the district adopts the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Native Language – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although the district does provide interpreters at meetings, they do not provide written notice in the native language of the parent, even when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent when feasible. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully informed of decisions made regarding the student's special education needs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section IV. Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21 and direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of over-representation of minority students. The district's improvement plan will be reviewed by staff members from the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office for Civil rights for sufficiency. The district further identified concerns regarding the referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, and vision and hearing screenings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech and language referrals and meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech and Language Referrals - During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that speech and language therapists are not making an immediate referral to the child study team when a language disability is suspected.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that when a student is referred for articulation issues and, during the course of the evaluation process the speech language therapist identifies language based issues, the student is immediately referred to the child study team. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students are evaluated in all areas of suspected disability and that evaluation decisions will be made by all required members of the eligibility and IEP teams. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Meeting Participants - During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that required participants are not always at IEP meetings. Teachers are asked to sign as participants when they were not in attendance at the meetings and guidance counselors are signing as teachers even though they have no direct educational responsibilities for those students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required participants are in attendance at meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all members of the team are involved in the decision-making process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

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, standardized assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments and acceptance and rejection of reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations for students being evaluated for speech and language services.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Multi-disciplinary Evaluations (Preschool) - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that preschool initial evaluations do not include the minimum required number of child study team assessments. The district is considering the speech-language assessment as one of the two minimum required, when in fact it must be considered an additional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a minimum of two child study team assessments are conducted for preschool initial evaluations. The implementation of these activities will result in appropriate assessments being conducted to determine eligibility for special education and related services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluations completed by June 30th of students last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of three-year timelines and planning meetings for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 eligibility criteria and statements of eligibility.

During the self assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of signatures of agreement/disagreement, provision of evaluation reports to parents/adult students ten days prior to a meeting, and provision of speech-language services prior to determining eligibility for special education and related services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

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

Section VIII. Individual Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of present levels of educational performance (PLEP) and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for providing the parent/adult student with the opportunity to observed the proposed placement. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding provision of IEPs to parents and connection of goals and objectives to the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district also identified concerns regarding meeting participants, considerations and required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, frequency and duration of time in-class resource teacher is present in class, and extended school year rationale in IEPs for students eligible of speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address considerations and required statements and frequency and duration of in-class support because although the district will revise their IEP there is no administrative oversight component to ensure these activities will occur. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address implementation dates, annual review timelines, copy of IEPs to parents and teacher access responsibility because although the district documents the need in each one of these areas they did not identify the activities that will achieve the outcome and the plan lacks an administrative oversight to ensure these activities will occur. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives.

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives - During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that goals and objectives are not always included in the IEPs of students placed in resource centers or self-contained programs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that goals and objectives are included in students IEPs for all subjects where the student receives special education services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that teachers have the necessary information regarding students' needs and the benchmarks against which progress can be measured. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

**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 areas of individual decision-making and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making process for 3-year-old preschool disabled, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and out-of-district participation of nonacademic and extracurricular activities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks activities to remove the barriers, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

Section X. Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 16 needed transition service needs and student invitations to meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of identification of the liaison to post-secondary resources. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding agency invitations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during on-site monitoring regarding courses of study and student interests and preferences.

Area(s) of Need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that courses of study do not specify the electives that students have chosen.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that specific electives are identified in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will result in a connection between these courses and the students' interests and preferences and post secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

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

Interests and Preferences – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that if students are unable to attend the IEP meeting, information regarding their interests and preferences is not consistently obtained. In addition, the IEP frequently documented interests and preferences as undecided.

- **The district will revise their improvement plan to include activities to ensure that interests and preferences are obtained from students if they are not at IEP meetings and that they are clearly documented in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the connection can be made between a student’s interests and preferences and courses of study. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section X. Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the activities. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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 procedural safeguards, documentation to case managers and suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determination meetings and interim alternative educational settings. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because they did not identify the activities that will achieve the outcome and the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent compliant implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

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

Section XII. Statewide Assessments

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of participation, approved accommodations and modifications and alternate proficiency assessment.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding IEP documentation for students eligible for speech and language services. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding the child study teams' knowledge of the content of statewide assessments. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, home instruction and common planning time.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding descriptions of special class programs. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding group size for resource center and procedures to facilitating the entry of students residing in state facilities into the local district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district also identified concerns regarding the need for additional personnel. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure these activities will occur. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of locations of other records.

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding access sheets. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns

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

regarding access/requests and procedures for maintenance/destruction of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 Pine Hill Borough School District on June 1 and 2, 2004. 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. 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 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 as well as the implementation of activities to bring about correction in some identified areas of need.

A review of the district's data and improvement plan to address problematic areas contributing to the data indicated the need for revisions.

A focus group meeting was held prior to the monitoring visit. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. They were generally pleased with the accessibility of the child study team and students' access to general education programs. Parents expressed concerns regarding high caseloads for child study team members, general education teachers' lack of knowledge of the IEP and the provision of related services, which are either not provided or they do not begin and end as indicated in the IEP.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions and Graduation Requirements.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find 3-21, direct referrals, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation completed by June 30th of students last year in preschool, eligibility criteria, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, individual decision making, continuum of programs, Oberti, preschool transition planning conferences, age 16 needed transition services, student invitation, procedural safeguards regarding discipline, documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations, alternate proficiency assessment, age range, home instruction and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding provision of related services, transfer students, program changes implemented prior to holding an IEP meeting, surrogate parents, notice of meeting, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, over-representation of minority students referred for special education, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services, functional assessments, three-year timelines, planning meetings, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement/disagreement rationale, copy of evaluation reports to parents/adult students, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to

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

parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process for three-year-old preschool disabled, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, out-of-district participation of nonacademic and extracurricular activities, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, agency invitation, behavioral intervention plan/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, group size, sufficient staff and description of special class programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, frequency, location, and duration of services, notice of a meeting, written notice, native language, speech and language referrals, meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, goals and objectives, courses of study and common planning time for teachers.

Within forty-five days (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Pine Hill Borough School District will revise the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.