

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

District: Pitman School District **County:** Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: November 18, 19, 20, 21, 2002

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano, Arlene Popovici, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Pitman School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pitman 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 Pitman 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 Pitman High School on November 12, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides Peer Mentoring Programs at the elementary, middle and high school level. This has been very effective in developing role models and reducing anxiety. Peer to peer activities are provided in reading and social activities.

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A Phonemic Awareness Program allows the district to provide weekly group instruction in each kindergarten classroom by a speech therapist. The district reports that this program has dramatically lowered the number of speech referrals at the elementary level.

The Homework Club/Check-in Program was formulated by the teachers to assist children who may otherwise have no support at home to complete homework assignments.

The district also provides a program in the middle school where the special education students read to the elementary school students.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General provisions and Statewide Assessment 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of transfer students and the provision of related services from September through May. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that when an extended school year program is provided, the IEP does not include a start or end date, the location of the program or a description of the program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs include a description of the extended school year program, including a start and end date and the location. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Speech - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that speech services do not describe the location or whether it is provided in a small group or on an individual basis. Additionally, IEPs do not include goals for articulation problems.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs for speech services include the location, whether the instruction will be provided in a group session or individually, and include**

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goals for articulation, when appropriate. The plan must include 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, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of meetings and written notice. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service 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 visit regarding consent.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions, summer referrals and identification meetings (timelines and participants). The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service 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 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 standardized assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

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

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for speech.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that functional assessments are not completed as part of speech evaluations for articulation problems.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments are completed as part of speech evaluations for students manifesting articulation difficulties. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of 3-year timelines, planning meeting participants, and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation planning meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluation Planning Meeting - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews and record review, that the district conducts a reevaluation planning meeting, reviews data, and if necessary, obtains consent to conduct assessments at the annual review meetings for those students who will require a reevaluation by the following school year. Because there is a significant gap between the review of data and the date of implementation of the decisions made as a result of that review, the data are no longer current. As such, the decisions made at the time of the review may no longer be valid.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at the reevaluation meeting, the district conducts a review of existing data and makes decisions based on that data that are implemented without undue delay. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of criteria and a statement of eligibility.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of copies of reports to parents and adult students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility meeting participants and signatures of agreement/disagreement with eligibility decisions.

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews indicated that regular education teachers do not consistently participate in eligibility meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers consistently participate in eligibility meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Signature of Agreement/Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interview that the district does not document the agreement/disagreement of all meeting participants with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the agreement/disagreement of meeting participants with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, goals and objectives linked to the core curriculum standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of present levels of educational performance, teacher access and responsibility, vocational school personnel participation, IEPs implemented by the age of 3, and IEP implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding behavior strategies and supports for classified students with behavior problems.

Area(s) of Need:

Behavior Strategies and Supports - During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that IEPs do not include behavior strategies and supports for classified students with behavior problems.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs include behavior strategies and supports for classified students with behavior problems. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the decision-making process, LRE documentation, considerations of supplemental aids and services, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic/extracurricular activities and preschool continuum. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district reports it does not have collaborative relationships with local community preschools and the child study teams need some training in LRE.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation of out-of-district students.

Area(s) of Need:

Participation of Out-Of-District Students - During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews indicated that out-of-district students are not allowed to participate in some trips. A review of the district's procedures indicates the following statement: "Students who have demonstrated the need for placement in an out-of-district school usually are in need of a highly intensified program that can not be offered within a traditional setting. On an off-campus trip, it is generally not possible to provide the direct supervision required by students who are not able to function in a traditional high school setting. These students are not eligible to participate." As a result, students placed in out-of-district programs do not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular/nonacademic activities as do their disabled and nondisabled peers who are educated within district programs.

- **The district will revise its policies and improvement plan to include procedures to ensure every student has the opportunity to participate in extracurricular/nonacademic activities. The procedures must include a mechanism to ensure decisions are made on an individual basis by a duly constituted IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 14 transition and preferences and interests surveys and assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 16 services and student/agency invitations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of student/agency invitations. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of age 16 transition services because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service 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 visit.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference, consideration of early childhood education program with supplemental aids and services, Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Disabled by age 3, and IEPs not implemented by the age of 3. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination, and Interim Alternative Educational Settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedural safeguards.

Area(s) of Need:

Procedural Safeguards – During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that students identified as potentially disabled are not afforded the same protections as classified students under the disciplinary requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students who are identified as potentially disabled are afforded**

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the same procedural safeguards as classified students under the disciplinary requirements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of participation in graduation activities by out-of-district students.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP components for graduation and written notice of graduation.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP components – During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that graduation requirements are not documented in the IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the IEP documents graduation requirements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews indicated that written notice of graduation is not provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time, child study team staffing and special class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of requests and maintenance and destruction of student records.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations- During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that the central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pitman School District on November 18, 19, 20, 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 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 revisions 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 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. Parents were generally pleased with the district and the services that are provided. The three parents who attended the meeting expressed some concerns with regard to shared time at the high school and the vocational technology school, extended school year services and delays in purchasing specialized equipment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, direct referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, 3 year reevaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool, criteria, statement of eligibility, goals and objectives, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEP's to parents, 90 day timelines, LRE decision-making, LRE documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, age 14 transition services, preferences and interests, discipline procedural safeguards, statewide assessment, out-of-district participation, class size waivers, age range waivers, home instruction, student records, and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding FAPE/provision of programs, related service timelines, transfer students (child study team review), notice of meetings, written notice, pre-referral interventions, identification meetings timelines and participants, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, copy of reports/ evaluations to parents 10 days prior to meetings, present levels of education performance, teacher access and responsibility, changes made prior to holding the IEP, nonacademic/extracurricular activities, continuum of program, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool by age 3, IEP not implemented by age 3, age 16 transition, student/agency invitation, discipline documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments/behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, consultation time, and special class descriptions.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, speech services, functional assessments, eligibility meeting participants, signatures of agreement/disagreement rationale, IEP considerations and required statements, notification/participation of out-of-district students for non-academic/extracurricular activities, discipline procedural safeguards,

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IEP graduation requirements, written notice of graduation, and documentation of location of other student records.

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