

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

District: Pittsgrove Township School District **County:** Salem

Monitoring Dates: November 15 &16, 2004

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Jane Marano and Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Pittsgrove Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pittsgrove Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Pittsgrove Township 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 Arthur P. Schalick High School on October 14, 2004. 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

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District Strengths:

The district is commended for the many supports made available to both general education and special education students after the traditional school day. One program provides after school assistance in preparing for state assessments. Tutoring is also available through the Study Island program conducted after the traditional school day ends. Teachers also make themselves available to assist students with homework at three locations within the district.

The district is also commended for the development of community support. Partnerships have been established with businesses and organizations such as Parvin State Park, The Centerton Inn and Appel Farms.

The district provides a range of options for students in preparation for transition to adult life. The Arthur P. Schalick high school, in a collaborative effort with other high schools located in Salem County, offers high school students the opportunity to select one of the specialized Academy programs offered at the participating high schools. Both general education students and students with disabilities are able to choose programs based on their preferences and interests.

All students attending the Arthur P. Schalick High School benefit from the services provided by the Transition Coordinator. An annual Career Day provides students opportunity to meet with as many as fifty representatives from schools and businesses who provide input and guidance regarding post-secondary education and employment.

Data Summary:

Data included in the self assessment indicate that for the 2003-2004 school year, the district's classification rate of 12.9 % was below the state average of 14.35%. The classification rate has remained below the state average for 4 years. Over a three year period, the percentage of students with disabilities included in general education for more than 80% of the day has increased from 36.8% to 41.8%.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, and Student Services 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 indicated compliance in the areas of dissemination of IDEA information, policies and procedures and parent training.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of staff development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of facilities, certifications, length of school day/year and transfer students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of hearing aids, counseling goals and objectives, implementation of speech and language services in accordance with IEP implementation dates, and program description for extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of hearing aids, provision of speech and language services and documentation of extended school year for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of counseling goals and objectives and documentation of extended school year for students eligible for special education and related services. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement the improvement plan in these areas resulting in compliance in this area.

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

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through the interview process determined that extended school year is not considered and discussed for each student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure extended school year is considered and discussed for each student with qa disability and provided when need is determined by the IEP team. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students receive the appropriate programs and services regardless of placement and eligibility category. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Related Services - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that students are not consistently receiving related services at the frequency identified in the student's IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure students receive related services according to the frequency and duration identified in their IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that each student is provided the level of related services necessary to benefit from instruction as determined by the IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of consent, meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice of a meeting for students eligible for special education and related services and content of written notice for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of surrogate parent. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of notice of meeting because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the revised notices of meeting are consistently provided to parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of written notice because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure written notice is consistently provided to parents and includes all required components. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice.

Area of Need:

Written Notice - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that written notice is not consistently provided to parents no later than fifteen calendar days after making a determination for students eligible for special education and related services and those eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written notice is provided within fifteen calendar days after making a determination. Implementation of these activities will ensure the parent is informed in writing of decisions made at the meeting and the factors considered in making the decision. In addition, the provision of written notice will inform the parent that he or she has fifteen days to review the decision and consider the determination prior to implementing the proposed action unless the parent or adult students agrees in writing that it may be implemented sooner. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of referral process for students eligible for special education and related services, direct referrals and identification meeting timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of referral process for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because its administrative oversight component must be expanded to include components of the referral process for speech and language services. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

The district also identified concern in the area of identification meeting participants. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure a regular education teacher attends preschool identification meetings. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities, vision and hearing screenings, health summary and identification meeting participants.

Areas of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that child find activities are limited to children ages three to five.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure child find activities include students ages 3 through 21. Implementation of these activities will ensure all students with disabilities who are in need of special education and related services, including students with disabilities attending nonpublic schools are located, referred and identified. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are not consistently conducted prior to the identification meeting conducted as a result of a direct parental referral.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are conducted prior to identification meetings and provided to the team. Implementation of these activities will ensure that information is available at the time of the identification meeting to determine the need for an evaluation and, if needed, the assessments that will be conducted to determine eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Identification Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review indicated that general education teachers are not consistently in attendance at identification meetings conducted during the summer. This issue is addressed in Section VII.

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of eligible for special education and related services multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified in the area of dating reports prepared by child study team members. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan in this area and brought about compliance.

The district identified additional concerns in the areas of evaluations, functional assessments and written reports for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure all required components of the speech evaluation have been conducted and documented in the final report. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

No additional areas of need were identified.

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents and signature of agreement/disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services. The district also accurately indicated compliance in the area of signature of agreement/disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria, statement of eligibility and copy of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of statement of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of meetings, criteria and reports to parents because it lacks a sufficient administrative oversight component to ensure activities bring about continued compliance. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

The district also identified concern in the area of statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement the improvement plan in the area of statement of eligibility for special education and related services which has resulted in compliance.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants.

Area of Need:

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that general education teachers do not attend identification and eligibility meetings conducted during the summer months.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure general education teachers attend identification and eligibility meetings conducted during the summer. Implementation of these activities will ensure all required participants who have knowledge of the student and programs are involved in the decision making process when determining eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of annual review and ninety day timelines, meetings, age of majority, implementation dates, teacher access and knowledge and annual reviews completed by June 30.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, present level of educational performance, and required components for IEPs for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of required components for IEPs for students eligible for special education and related services and present level of educational performance. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan in these areas and has brought about compliance. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of IEP components for students eligible for speech and language services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of meeting participants because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure input is obtained from vocational school staff when they do not attend annual review meetings for students attending the vocational school on a shared time basis. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of school age and preschool age individual decision making, general education access, full continuum of placements, documentation regarding the least restrictive environment, and supplemental aides and services.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of participation in extra-curricular and non-academic activities by students receiving services in out-of-district placements. The barrier identified by the district was a lack of a written procedure to ensure students were notified of activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of age 16 needed transition services, student participation and courses of study.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency invitation, age fourteen transition service needs and consent to conduct an individual interest and preference assessment. The district improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan in the area of age fourteen transition service needs which has resulted in compliance.

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 indicated compliance in the areas of early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3 and preschool transition planning conference.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards and notification to case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of suspension tracking, reconvening IEP meetings, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavior assessments, and behavior intervention plans. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan in the area of suspension tracking which has resulted in compliance.

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

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Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of participation, IEP documentation and approved accommodations and modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of Special Review Assessment. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately indicated compliance in the areas of diploma, written notice of graduation and participation of students placed in out-of-district programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of documentation of graduation requirements in the IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan which has resulted in 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 indicated compliance in the areas of child study team, common planning time, class size, group size for speech therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of age range. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented its improvement plan in the area of age range which has resulted in compliance.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access sheets, documentation of location of other records and maintenance and destruction of records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of access of student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pittsgrove Township School District on November 15 and 16, 2004. 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 a comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for implementing several sections of the improvement plan prior to the on-site monitoring that resulted in compliance. 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.

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 stated that the district welcomes their participation in the education of their children. Parental input is encouraged and supported. Parents also expressed satisfaction with communication with case managers, teachers and members of the administration. One parent stated that the transition process from early intervention to preschool was smooth and efficient. Parents indicated a lack of knowledge about extended school year programs. This concern was supported by information obtained during the on-site visit.

A review of data indicated a classification rate below the state average. Over a three year period, the district has increased the percentage of students who spend more than 80% of their day in general education.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included reevaluation and student services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, policies and procedures, parent training, facilities, certification, length of school day/year, transfer students, consent, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, interpreters at meetings, referral process for students eligible for special education and related services, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessment, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports for students eligible for special education and related services, eligibility meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents and signature of agreement – disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services, signature of agreement – disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, annual review meetings, age of majority, implementation dates, annual reviews conducted by age three, school age and preschool age individual decision making, continuum, general education access, documentation regarding least restrictive environment, supplemental aides and services, age sixteen needed transition services, student participation courses of study, early intervention to preschool disabled class by age three, preschool transition conference, interim alternative educational setting, documentation of suspension to case manager, discipline procedural safeguards, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, diploma, written notice of graduation,

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participation in graduation exercises, child study team, class size, group size for speech, common planning time and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, hearing aides, provision of related services, extended school year, surrogate parents, notice of meeting, written notice, referral process for students eligible for speech and language services, identification meeting participant, dating reports, speech and language evaluations, functional assessments and written reports, statements of eligibility, speech and language eligibility meetings, criteria, copy of evaluation reports to parents, required components of IEPs, Present Level of Education Performance, annual review meeting participants, participation of students in out of district programs in extra curricular and non academic activities, agency invitation, age fourteen transition service needs, consent to conduct individual interest and preference assessments, suspension tracking, reconvening IEP meeting, manifestation determination meeting, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, Special Review Assessment, documentation of graduation requirements, and age range.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, written notice, child find activities, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, and eligibility meeting participants,

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