

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Pompton Lakes School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: April 5 and 6, 2004

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear, Gladys Miller and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Pompton Lakes School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pompton Lakes 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 Pompton Lakes 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.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Lakeside Middle School on April 1, 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, 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 is commended for providing specialized reading instruction with Orton Gillingham trained reading specialists. This service is provided in the replacement reading and language arts programs in the elementary, middle and high school levels.

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The district is further commended for creating a specialized counseling group for female middle school students. This program includes classified and non-classified female students and centers on appropriate socialization skills and coping issues.

The district is also commended for developing an Autistic program that runs in conjunction with the Ringwood School District. The Pompton Lakes School District houses the pre-school autistic class and the primary class while the Ringwood Middle School houses the program specifically for the middle school aged autistic students. This program serves a variety of educational needs as many students who begin their education within the self-contained setting of the Autistic class transition to inclusion in fully mainstreamed settings.

Data Summary:

Data submitted by the district indicated that although the placement of pre-school students in general education settings is below the state average, the district has developed a district goal to increase inclusion opportunities as well as general education links within the community. Additionally, because data indicated that 38.6% of students with disabilities are educated in the general education environment for more than 80% of the day, the district has developed a goal to provide staff development to administration and regular and special education personnel in the areas of least restrictive environment, instructional strategies and modifications and strategies for student behavior.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Free, Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Re-evaluation, Transition, Statewide Assessments, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings, participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district has begun activities to bring these areas into compliance.

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

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Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance and rejection of reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Acceptance and Rejection of Reports - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that evaluation reports from outside agencies are neither accepted nor rejected by the child study team.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that child study team members accept or reject reports submitted by outside agencies. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any report or part of a report that was rejected by the child study team and the reason(s) why it was rejected. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services and signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services and provision of documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational

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performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, provision of IEP to parents, ninety day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, annual review procedures and implementation of programs following annual reviews. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making process, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation and continuum of programs.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding documentation of least restrictive environment decisions.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Least Restrictive Environment Decisions - During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that the district's IEP does not consistently include all four statements required when considering the least restrictive environment. Additionally, when statements are documented they are not addressed appropriately.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the considerations of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modification; the explanation of why the supplementary aids, services and program modifications are not appropriate; the documentation of the comparison of the benefits in each setting; the documentation of the comparison of the benefits for the student and a statement regarding extracurricular and nonacademic participation. Implementation of these activities will document the decision-making process and more clearly define the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. It is recommended that the district adopt the model IEP developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention

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plans, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination and interim alternate education setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of procedural safeguards for short term removals. 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 Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements at age 14 and out of district participation.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of Graduation - During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that written notice of graduation is not provided to graduating seniors

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of graduation is provided to all graduating seniors. Implementation of these activities will ensure that graduating seniors and their parents are aware that upon graduation, eligibility for special education and related services ceases. It is recommended that the district adopt the form developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pompton Lakes School District on April 5 and 6, 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 the exceptionally 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 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.

The district has developed goals to increase the opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day.

At a focus group meeting held during the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Additionally, parents commented on the accessibility of team members and teachers. However, some parents are displeased with the difficulty of scheduling and level of transition services at the high school level. In addition, although all parents indicated that they are very involved in the IEP process, some parents indicated that they are not made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, goals and objectives for related services, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, transfer procedures, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, meetings, notice of meeting, written notice, notices in native language, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting, timelines and participants, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services, IEP meetings, consideration and required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, provision of IEP to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making process, regular education access, extracurricular and nonacademic participation, continuum of programs, preschool transition conference, Early Intervention to pre-school disabled by age 3, student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, IEP graduation requirements, out-of-district participation, consultation time, age range, class

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size, group sizes, home instruction, access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding Child Find, pre-referral interventions, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services, documentation of eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services, IEP participants, annual review procedures, annual review implementation and procedural safeguards for short term removals.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding acceptance and rejection of reports, documentation of least restrictive environment and notice of graduation.

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