

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

District: Ramsey School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: March 10, 11, 12 and 13, 2003

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller, Damen Cooper and Jenifer Tucci

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Ramsey School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Ramsey 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 Ramsey 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 Ramsey High School on March 3, 2003. 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 their commitment to extensive staff development training for regular education staff and special education staff through the STAR (Strategies for Teaching Advancement in Ramsey) program. The district also has provided training in assistive technology, preventing academic failure, cooperative discipline, strategies for

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diversified learners and curriculum. Additionally, the district initiated a program to decrease bullying in the fourth and fifth grades that included all students and staff.

The district provides administrative liaisons for special education in each building. Building principals and vice principals play integral roles in providing inclusive opportunities to all children. Further, individual schools have been awarded Best Practices awards and recognized as one of the thirty one best elementary schools in New Jersey by New Jersey Monthly Magazine.

The district also provides counseling to students of divorced parents through the Banana Splits program. In addition, all students participate in enrichment programs, extracurricular activities and clubs.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, FAPE, Procedural Safeguards, Graduation Requirements and Programs and 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 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, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists are including eligibility statements in their evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure related service personnel do not include eligibility statements in their reports since those determinations may only be made by an appropriately configured IEP team. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and participants at planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations after the eligibility meeting.

Area(s) of Need:

Agreement and Disagreement Rationale - During the on-site visit, record review indicated that the district has developed a form that only affords eligibility team members the opportunity to document their agreement with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its form to ensure meeting participants have the opportunity to document their agreement and/or disagreement with eligibility determinations and that any dissenting opinion includes a written rationale.**

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines and ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation dates and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding regular education access for preschool disabled students.

Area(s) of Need:

Regular Education Access for Preschool Disabled Students - During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district does not afford preschool disabled students the opportunity to be educated with their nondisabled peers because they have not established links with community-based programs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district establishes links with community-based preschool programs or develops its own general education preschool program to afford students with disabilities the opportunity to be educated with their nondisabled peers.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement and student agency invitations.

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The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-school transition planning conferences and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternative assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child study team knowledge of the content of statewide assessments. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional areas of need were 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 access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access and requests of records including amending student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 Ramsey School District on March 10, 11, 12, and 13, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A number of parents praised the district's programs and staff. Some parents expressed concerns regarding pre-school access to general education, participation at IEP meetings and transition. Many of the concerns identified by the parents were identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, professional and parent development, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services, length of day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, summer referrals, ID meeting timelines and participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, consideration and required statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, individualized decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services, continuum, suspension tracking, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, interim alternate educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size, age range, group sizes, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding vision and hearing screenings, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluations completed by June 30th, implementation dates, teacher access and responsibility, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, age fourteen transition service needs, courses and preferences, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, student and agency invite, pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, discipline procedures, documentation to

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case manager, manifestation determination, CST knowledge of statewide assessment and access to student records relating to amending of records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding written reports, agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations and regular education access for preschool disabled students.

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