

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

District: Rancocas Valley Regional High School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: May 5, 6, 7, 8, 2003

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Michael Lee, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Rancocas Valley Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Rancocas Valley Regional High 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 Rancocas Valley Regional High 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 Rancocas Valley Regional High School on April 30, 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 provides extensive teacher training via the "School Attuned" program, funded by a grant from the Dodge Foundation. Teachers learn classroom strategies that will assist all students, including but not limited to classified students, who have unique learning needs. The district also provides the Wilson Program, study skills and tutorial

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services. Study skills interventions are provided to any student who may require extra help in challenging subject areas. In addition, tutorial services are offered before school between the hours of 7:30 am and 8:00 am and provide students with additional opportunities for instruction. The district provides crisis intervention and members of the child study team participate. Each day one member of the child study team is on call for students in crisis. The child study team will immediately intervene and provide counseling as well as provide recommendations. Follow-up counseling is provided.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, IEP, Statewide Assessment and Eligibility 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 provision of programs, length of day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, related services and adaptive physical education. **The districts improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding transfer procedures and location of related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Transfer Procedures - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although the child study team conducts an immediate review of the evaluation information and IEP of a student who has transferred into district, when the decision is made to change the placement of the student, the IEP is not revised to reflect that change. In addition, when the IEP from the previous school district is incomplete, the child study team and/or speech therapist does not convene a meeting to revise the IEP to include the missing components.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when the decision is made to change the placement of a student who has transferred into the district the IEP is revised to reflect that change. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Related Services – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the location of related services in not included in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its IEP format to include the location of related services.**

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding parental participation at meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Participation at Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that the district does not consistently make multiple attempts to ensure parental participation at meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multiple attempts are made to ensure parents have the opportunity to participant in meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, referral process and direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral intervention and establishing timelines for effectiveness of interventions. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need 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.**

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

Area(s) of Need:

Health Summary/Vision and Hearing Screening – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that the health summary and vision and hearing screenings are not conducted in a timely manner

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is referred to the child study team the school nurse summarizes available health and medical information on the student, conducts vision and hearing screenings, and provides this information to**

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the child study team by the time of the identification meeting is held. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Identification Meeting Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that identification meeting timelines could not be verified because referral dates were not documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all referrals are dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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, bilingual evaluations, accept/rejection of reports and independent evaluations.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that functional assessments do not always include a parent interview and a teacher interview.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments include parent and teacher interviews. The plan must include an administrative oversight 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 3-year timelines and planning meeting participants.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluations for students eligible for speech-language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluations – During the on-site monitoring, review of records and interviews with the speech-language specialist indicated that reevaluations are not conducted for students eligible for speech/language services prior to their declassification. Declassifications occur at the time of the annual review without conducting a reevaluation planning meeting to review existing data or to determine the need for additional assessments to determine the appropriate eligibility status.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluation planning meetings are conducted prior to determining a student is no longer eligible for services. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 Oberti and general education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, and continuum. **The districts improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding non-academic and extracurricular participation.

Area(s) of Need:

Individual Decision Making - During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that the IEP team does not have the authority to make individual decisions for student's placement. IEPs are written in general terms so that actual placement decisions are made at the time of scheduling.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan include procedures to ensure that the IEP team has the authority to make individual decisions regarding placement of students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Non-academic and Extracurricular Participation – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff and parents indicated that students in out-of-district placements are not notified of nonacademic and extracurricular activities offered within the district. As a result, these students are not participating in these activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students in out-of-district placements are notified of nonacademic and extracurricular activities to further ensure they have the opportunity to participate in these activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in all areas of transition to post school. **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 elements.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

This section is not applicable because Rancocas Valley is a regional high school district.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding additional days of removal, functional behavior assessments and manifestation determination meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation to Case Managers – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that when a student is removed from program for disciplinary reasons – and the parent does not return with the student upon completion of the suspension – the suspension is extended until the parent returns.

- **The district will immediately cease extending periods of suspension because of a lack of parental participation in “return” meetings. The district will also revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it implements appropriate procedures regarding student removals and returns subsequent to a disciplinary incident. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Behavioral Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records indicated that if a student is removed for more than 10 school days the district does not consistently convene an IEP meeting the first time the removal exceeds 10 days to review the behavioral intervention plan or, if one is not in place, to determine if a functional behavioral assessment and a behavioral intervention plan is needed.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans are reviewed and revised when necessary. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Manifestation Determination Meetings – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that manifestation determination meetings are not consistently conducted when a change in placement will occur.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that manifestation determination meetings are conducted when required. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and out-of-district participation in graduation ceremonies.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated the district does not provide written notice of graduation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that parents and adult students receive written notice of graduation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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, age range, group size for speech therapy and consultation time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child study team personnel and case management responsibilities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding home instruction.

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Area(s) of Need:

Home Instruction – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated that prior to placing a student on home instruction, the district does not obtain approval for that action from the county office.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district obtains approval from the county office prior to placing a student on home instruction. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

An 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 monitoring, it was determined that central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Rancocas Valley Regional High School District on May 5, 6, 7 and 8, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify areas of need and to 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.

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 of students placed out-of-district believe that their children do not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular and non-academic activities within the district. This statement was verified during the on-site visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, provision of programs, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, notice in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, direct referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, accept/rejection of reports, independent evaluation, three year timelines, planning meetings/participants, eligibility, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90 days timelines, certification of agreement/disagreement rationale, teacher access responsibility, Oberti, general education access, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, statewide assessments, IEP requirements for graduation and out of district participation, class size, age range, group size for speech therapy, consultation time, access/request for records and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding, extended school year, related services (i.e., counseling), adaptive physical education, pre-referral intervention, establishing timelines for effectiveness of interventions, individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, continuum, transition to post school, child study team personnel and case management responsibilities.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training, transfer procedures, location of related services, meetings, health summary/vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, reevaluations for students eligible for speech-language services, non-academic and extracurricular participation, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination meetings, documentation to case managers, written notice of graduation, home instruction and documentation of other locations.

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