

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

District: Ringwood School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: September 29, 30 and October 1, 2003

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Ringwood School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Ringwood 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 Ringwood 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 M.J. Ryerson Middle School on September 24, 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 the Homework Club which is offered at the MJ Ryerson Middle School and is sponsored by the Ringwood Education Foundation. All students have the opportunity to seek assistance from a teacher during the after school program. The program runs for one and a half hours two times a week. Late buses are provided for all students.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district is also commended for its Ringwood Educational Foundation. The mission of the foundation is to enrich the educational experience of all students attending Ringwood's public schools. The foundation's Board of Trustees is comprised of community members who award grants for significant enhancements to the curriculum. Special education students have benefited from this grant since it has provided alternate and supplemental materials in the classroom. For example, the Ringwood Educational Foundation provided Animath and Hands-on-Health which offers a variety of educational experiences with the classroom. To date, since its inception in 2001, the Ringwood Educational Foundation has granted over \$45,500.00.

Data Summary:

The district's data from school years 2000, 2001 and 2002, indicated that over 50% of the students eligible for special education and related services were educated in general education settings for more than 80% of the day; this is above the state average of 40.7%, 42% and 41.6% respectively. Additionally, in the 2002 school year, 43.3% of students eligible for special education and related service are educated in the regular education setting 40-80% of time, which is above the state average of 30.9%. Data indicates that in 2002, 76% of the preschool disabled population is educated in a special education setting and 24% is educated in a general education setting. These data were questioned, however, because the district has not established links with community based preschool programs, nor does the district offer a general education preschool program. Therefore, the entire preschool disabled population is educated in a special education setting. A review of the districts classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 14.1% (without speech only students) as compared to the state's average of 13.9%. During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined the district needs to increase its child find activities because its current activity is insufficient to address the needs of the district.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Evaluation, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, training of professional staff and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of training of paraprofessionals. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because the personnel identified in the plan to provide the training are currently unable to maintain compliance with mandated activities such as conducting evaluations and participating in IEP meetings. The improvement plan needs to be revised to identify other available resources, such as consultants or state sponsored professional development sessions, as the individuals responsible to provide these training sessions.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding parent training.

Area(s) of Need:

Parent Training – During the on-site monitoring visit, parent and staff interviews indicated that training activities are not provided to parents to assist them in understanding the needs of their children.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district provides training for parents to assist them in understanding how their children’s needs impact educational performance. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are afforded the opportunity to more fully participate in special education process and to more successfully advocate for their children. The plan must include the development and distribution of a needs assessment to determine the topics that need to be addressed.**

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding facilities. Observation in room 3 in E. G. Hewitt Elementary School and room 3 in Peter Cooper Elementary School indicated dual use of a resource room. This information has been provided to the county office.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding frequency and location of programs and related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Location/Frequency of Programs and Related Services - During the on-site monitoring, interview and record review indicated that the location and frequency for related services is not documented in IEPs. Additionally, IEPs do not indicate the frequency, duration, and location of resource center programs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure IEPs specifically identify the location in which related services will be provided and the frequency of the provision of these services. Activities must further ensure a full description of resource center programs in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff are knowledgeable of the programs and services the student will receive in**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

order to derive educational benefit from these special education programs and services.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities and pre-referral interventions.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find Activities - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not conduct adequate child find activities to locate and identify potentially disabled students because the district limits their activities to a newspaper advertisement once a year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to procedures and training to expand the scope of their child find activities to ensure these activities result in the location, referral, and identification of children between the ages of 3 and 21 who may require special education services.**

Pre-referral interventions - During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that although students are reviewed by the Intervention and Referral Service Team (I&RST), the district does not provide interventions in general education to those students who are experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. Instead, the student is immediately referred to the child study team after the I&RST meeting has taken place.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures and training to ensure strategies and interventions are provided to students referred to the I&RS committee and document the effectiveness of the interventions to determine whether these interventions are successful or require revisions. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive supports and services within the general education program to address their needs. Should these supports and services fail to adequately address these needs, then a determination may be made that the student is potentially disabled and may warrant an**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

evaluation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Section VII: Eligibility:

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding signatures of agreement or disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Signatures of agreement or disagreement – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district does not document assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district documents assenting and dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates and annual review and ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of IEPs to parents. The plan is insufficient to address this area based on information obtained from parents and staff members during interviews that changes made to the draft IEP document are not reflected accurately in the final copy of the IEP that is provided to the parent. **The plan needs to be revised to include activities to ensure parents are provided with a copy of the IEP that accurately reflects IEP**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

team decisions. The plan must further include activities and an administrative oversight component that requires the case managers to review all finalized IEPs to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in the IEPs. The district also identified a concern in the area of considerations and required statements, specifically in the area of documentation of group sizes for speech and language services and documentation of graduation requirements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding teacher access and responsibility and considerations and required statements, specifically in the area of accommodations and modifications.

Area(s) of Need:

Teacher Access and Responsibility – During the on-site monitoring, interview and record review indicated the district does not require general education teachers and paraprofessionals to access or read the IEPs of students for whom they have direct educational responsibility. As a result, students are not receiving the supports and services contained in their IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all general education teachers and paraprofessionals having direct educational responsibility for a student with a disability have access to and read the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive all supports and services required by the IEP to further ensure the student has the opportunity to receive full educational benefit from the special education program and services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Considerations and Required Statements/Accommodations and Modifications - During the on-site monitoring visit, interview and record review indicated that student accommodations and modifications are not individualized. Instead, every IEP contains identical accommodations and modifications.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that accommodations and modifications are based on the individual needs of the students. Implementation of these activities will ensure each accommodation and/or modification is identified and provided to address the needs of the student and to allow the student to demonstrate the acquisition of specific educational skills.**

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 and consideration of supplementary aids and services.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding continuum of programs and regular education access for preschool disabled students.

Area(s) of Need:

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the district establishes links with community-based preschool programs or develops its own general education preschool program. Implementation of these activities will ensure preschool students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers.**

Section X: Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference, age fourteen transition service needs and preferences and interests.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding placement of students into a preschool disabled program by age three.

Area(s) of Need:

Early Intervention Program to Pre-School Disabled by age Three - During the on-site monitoring visit, interview and record review indicated that though students are identified in a timely manner by Early Intervention personnel, these students are not placed by age three.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that preschool disabled students are provided with programs and services by their third birthday. Implementation of these activities will result in the timely provision of programs and services and will eliminate any lapse in services.**

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

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of IEP requirements at age fourteen. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, home instruction and consultation time.

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

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Ringwood School District on September 29 and 30 and October 1, 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. As a result of the self-assessment review conducted by the schools district, some areas of need were identified and an improvement plan was developed.

A review of district data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students age 6-21 in the regular education setting for more than 40% of the school day. However because the district has not established links with community based preschool programs, their preschool disabled population has no opportunity to be educated with their nondisabled peers. Instead, all preschool disabled students are educated in a segregated setting.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed numerous concerns with the services provided to their children. Parents stated that although specific services were agreed to at IEP meetings, when they received copies of the final IEP, those services were either omitted or changes. Parents feel they are discouraged by the Child Study Team from requesting services in the IEP but instead are encouraged to seek additional help from the teaching staff. Parents feel that considerable administrative barriers prevent the provision of appropriate services and programs for their children. At a public meeting with the director held last year, parents expressed their concerns in fourteen areas of special education. Those areas included training of all relevant staff, IEP implementation, delivery of related services, etc. During the on-site, it was determined that many of these concerns were not addressed during the self-assessment process. Some parents expressed their frustration in communicating with the Superintendent regarding the needs of their children, as they do not feel they are being heard or that their children's needs are being addressed.

Other parents expressed disappointment when a pilot program for Kindergarten students was not continued. This program had afforded these disabled students the opportunity to receive educational services in the morning and supported instruction in the afternoon to reinforce their educational experiences. Parents further indicated there was no regular education access for their disabled preschool students and commented they would like to have more in-class support at all grade levels.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, professional staff training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of day and year, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screening, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, evaluations, reevaluations, eligibility meetings and participants, eligibility criteria and statements, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for special education and related services, IEP meetings and participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety-day timelines, decision-making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, preschool transition conference, age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interest,

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

discipline, statewide assessments, class size, age range, home instruction, consultation time, and student records

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training of paraprofessionals, transfer students, surrogate parents, copies of evaluations to parents, considerations and required statements for speech therapy group sizes and IEP requirements for graduation, administrative changes to IEPs, notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic and extracurricular activities and the lack of sufficient staff.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training, frequency and location of programs and related services, facilities, child-find activities, pre-referral interventions, signatures of agreement and disagreement for students eligible for speech and language services, appropriate individualized accommodations and modifications, teacher and paraprofessional access and responsibility for IEP implementation, continuum of programs, regular education access and early intervention to preschool by age three.

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