

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

District: River Dell Regional

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: December 8 and 9, 2005

Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Michelle Fenwick and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the River Dell Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, service and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the River Dell Regional 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 River Dell Regional 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A three-year review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that the district is providing services to more than 73.2% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This is above the state average of 41.6%. A review of the district's classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 12% as compared to the state's average of 14.6%.

Standard not Applicable:

Transition to Preschool was not reviewed by the NJDOE because the district does not serve a population of students for which related regulations apply.

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Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant: General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the Department of Education as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation ▪ Extended school year ▪ Provision of programs ▪ Provision of related services
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find Ages 3-21 ▪ Direct Referrals ▪ Health summary ▪ Vision and hearing screenings ▪ Identification meeting timelines ▪ Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS) ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators (ESERS)
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation ▪ Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30 ▪ 90 day timelines
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of "needed transition

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
	<p>services”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suspension tracking system ▪ Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students ▪ IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days ▪ Procedures for determination of change in placement ▪ Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment ▪ Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement ▪ Short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided ▪ Interim Alternative Educational Settings ▪ Manifestation determinations

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Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. During the on-site monitoring visit, the NJDOE verified that improvement plan activities in several areas had been implemented and the district demonstrated compliance in those areas. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address the remaining areas that have not yet been corrected.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
FAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transfer Procedures – Transfer procedures required revisions. 		X
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral Process – IR&S process needs to be revised to ensure the committee members understand how to make a referral and the differences between making a referral to IR&S vs. the child study team. 	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions – A method is needed to improve the forwarding of information from the IR&S to the child study team. 	X	
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Functional assessments – Evaluations do not consistently document a history of interventions and interview. 	X	
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Criteria – There is a need to ensure that performance relative to eligibility criteria is clearly documented for students classified as SLD. 		X
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents – Copies are not provided 10 days prior to eligibility meeting. 		X
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants- General and special education teachers do not consistently attend meeting. 	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Required considerations and statements- There is a lack of consistent documentation of the beneficial and/or harmful effects of the student’s placement. 	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher knowledge and access to IEPs- The district identified a lack of variety of strategies to accommodate students with disabilities in general education classrooms. 	X	
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification to case manager- Administrators do not provide notification in writing when students are suspended. 	X	

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behavioral Intervention Plan- The district lacks procedures for developing plans. 	X	

Additional Areas of Need

The following area was originally identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as compliant but was found to be noncompliant by the New Jersey Department of Education during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
Transition to Adult Life	Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” - IEPs do not include each student’s course of study.	The district is directed to ensure that IEPs for students beginning at age 14 include the course of study in the statement of needed transition services. The district must implement procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure that IEPs include all required transition components.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the River Dell Regional School District on December 8 and 9, 2005. 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 all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about correction of non-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.

A three year review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that the district is providing services to more than 73.2% of students in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This is above the state average of 41.6%. A review of the district's classification rate indicated the district has a classification rate of 12% as compared to the state's average of 14.6%.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs, services and staff. However, a significant amount of parents expressed their concern with the impact of the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment results will have on their child's educational future and transition to the River Dell High School. Parents also expressed their frustration over the lack of related service providers during the summer and fall of 2004.

Sections identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation, extended school year, provision of programs, provision of related services, Child Find ages 3-21, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, educational impact statement, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators (ESERS), eligibility meeting participants, signature of agreement and/or disagreement rationale, statement of eligibility, implementation dates, IEP provided to parent prior to implementation, meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review or revise the IEP, annual reviews completed by June 30, 90 day timelines, beginning at age 16 statement of "needed transition services", student and agency invitation to IEP meetings, activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student's desired outcomes, suspension tracking system, discipline procedures employed equitably for all students, IEP team meeting for first removal beyond ten days, procedures for determination of change of placement, procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment, short-term removals resulting in a change of placement, short-term removals that are not a change of placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided, interim alternative education settings and manifestation determinations.

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Areas of need originally identified by the district, but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the monitors, are transfer procedures, eligibility criteria and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer procedures, referral process, pre-referral interventions, functional assessments, IEP meeting participants, IEP required considerations and statements, teacher knowledge and access to IEPs, notification to case manager and development of behavioral intervention plans.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding age 14 statement of "transition service needs".

The improvement plan submitted to the NJOSEP has been reviewed and approved. The district is expected to implement the activities described in the monitoring report to achieve compliance in all of the areas of need identified during self-assessment, and areas of need identified during the on-site visit, within six months of the date of this report. Verification of compliance will be conducted by the County Office of Education.