

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: River Edge School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: October 24 and 25, 2005

Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Michelle Fenwick and Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the River Edge School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the River Edge 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 Edge 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, related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. An interview with the district's speech-language specialists was also conducted. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data indicates a classification rate for 2004 of 13.06% which was below the state rate for that year of 16.58%. The rate without including students receiving only speech-language services was 7.27% compared to a state rate of 14.6%. Of 133 students, ages 6 to 21, receiving services, 97 (72.9%) were in general education settings for more than 80% of their school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state rate for this category. A total of 25 students (18.8%) were in general education between 40 and 60% of their day. A total of 10 students with disabilities (7.6%) were educated in public or private separate settings for 2004. This is below the state rate of 9.5% for that same year. For preschoolers, 5 of the 9 students eligible for services in 2004 were educated in a combination of general and special education settings. No

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

preschool students were educated in early childhood general education settings for their full program.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the school to review the implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into fifteen 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 with regulations: Transition to Preschool, Transition to Adult Life, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the charter school’s self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE 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
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Provision of notice of a meeting ▪ Content of notice of a meeting ▪ Meetings ▪ Provision of written notice ▪ Interpreters at meeting ▪ Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find Ages 3-21 ▪ Referral process ▪ Pre-referral interventions ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Identification meeting timelines
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Functional Assessments ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators (ESLS)
Reevaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reevaluation when change of eligibility is considered ▪ Timelines ▪ Planning meeting participants ▪ Reevaluations prior to age 5 ▪ Procedures when parental consent cannot be obtained

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

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale ▪ Statement of eligibility (specific learning disability) ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP required considerations and components (ESERS) ▪ 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 ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of LRE decisions ▪ Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs ▪ Continuum of programs ▪ Placement decisions based on students' individual needs

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

Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an ‘X’ in the ‘Needs Revision’ column.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
General Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent Training – The district identified a need for parent training in the area of FAPE. ▪ Professional Training – Teachers indicated the need for training in the areas of behavioral support, student records, responsibilities under IDEA and IEP development and eligibility. 	X		
FAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transfer Procedures – There is no process for locating students with disabilities who have transferred into the district. 	X		
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content of written notice – Written notices do not contain all required components. ▪ Notices in Native Language – The district identified a lack of resources for providing translation of notices. 	X		
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health Summary – Summaries are not provided prior to identification meetings. ▪ Vision and Hearing Screenings - The school nurse was unaware of the requirements to provide results to the child study team (CST) prior to identification meetings. 	X		
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standardized Assessments – Standardized tests are not considered as part of the initial evaluation of preschool-age students. ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators (ESERS) – Written reports do not contain all components. ▪ Educational Impact Statement (ESLS) - Written speech-language reports do not contain a teacher impact statement for students referred to the speech-language specialist. 	X		
X			X	
X			X	

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

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Reevaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of attempts to gain consent – Attempts to obtain parental consent for evaluations conducted as part of a reevaluation are not documented. 	X		
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eligibility Criteria – Eligibility reports do not consistently document the criteria for a specific learning disability. 	X		
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP Required Considerations and Components (ESLS) – Speech-language Specialists are not consistently documenting the educational impact on the IEP 	X		
LRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of and Participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities of students educated outside the district – Students placed in out-of-district programs were not on mailing list for activities. 	X		

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

Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
IEP	<p>Participants at Identification, Eligibility and IEP Meetings - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that pre-school general education teachers were not consistently participating at the meetings above.</p> <p>90-day timelines – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that initial evaluation and IEP implementation are not being completed within 90-days for preschoolers.</p>	<p>The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the participation of preschool general education teachers at identification, eligibility and IEP meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that general education teachers have the opportunity to provide information regarding age-appropriate expectations and skills to determine the need for evaluations, eligibility, progress, accommodations and modifications or suggestions for further interventions in general education settings. For IEP meetings, the district must develop a procedure for obtaining consent before an IEP team member will be excused. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedure. The procedure and related activities must be reflected in sections IV, VII and VIII of the improvement plan.</p> <p>The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that within 90 calendar days of obtaining parental consent for the initial evaluation, an IEP is implemented for each preschool student who is evaluated and determined eligible for special education and related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.</p>

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the River Edge School District. 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 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 OSEP as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data indicates a classification rate for 2004 of 13.06% which was below the state rate for that year of 16.58%. The rate without including students receiving only speech-language services was 7.27% compared to a state rate of 14.6%. Of 133 students, ages 6 to 21, receiving services, 97 (72.9%) were in general education settings for more than 80% of their school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state rate for this category. A total of 25 students (18.8%) were in general education between 40 and 60% of their day. A total of 10 students with disabilities (7.6%) were educated in public or private separate settings for 2004. This is below the state rate of 9.5% for that same year. For preschoolers, 5 of the 9 students eligible for services in 2004 were educated in a combination of general and special education settings. No preschool students were educated in early childhood general education settings for their full program.

Interviews were conducted with parents by phone. During parent interviews, inconsistent perspectives were expressed regarding the delivery of special education programs and services. While some parents indicated satisfaction with programs and services and communication with the district, a number of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the district programs, services and staff. Some parents cited difficulty communicating with special education staff. Some expressed concerns regarding preschool transition to kindergarten, the use of accommodations and modifications, provision of related services, in-class support and insufficient communication with case managers. Parents were also concerned with the impact the NJASK results will have on their children's educational futures and transition to the middle school. It is recommended that the director of special services meet with the district parent group to identify barriers to, and strategies for, improving communication with families.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: Transition to Preschool, Transition to Adult Life, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included oversight of (IEP) implementation, extended school year, provision of programs, provision of related services, consent, implementation without undue delay, provision and content of notice of meeting, provision of written notice, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators (ESLS), reevaluation when a change in eligibility is considered, three year timelines, planning meeting participants, reevaluations prior to age five, procedures when parental consent cannot be obtained, signature of disagreement or disagreement, statement of eligibility, copy of evaluations reports to

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

parents, IEP required considerations and components (ESERS), copy of IEP to parents prior to implementation, implementation dates, meetings held annually or more often if necessary to review and/or revise the IEP, annual reviews by June 30th, teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs), documentation of least restrictive environment (LRE) decisions, opportunities to access general education, continuum of programs and decisions based on individualized need.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent and staff training, transfer procedures, content of written notice, notices in native language, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, standardized assessments, written reports prepared by evaluators (ESERS), educational impact statement (ESLS), documentation of attempts to gain parental consent, eligibility criteria, IEP required considerations and components and notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside the district.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding participants at identification, eligibility and IEP meetings for preschool students, and ninety-day timelines for initial evaluations.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the River Edge School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the OSEP to address those areas that require revisions.