

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

District: Riverdale School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: December 10, 2004

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear, Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Susan Wilson

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Riverdale School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Riverdale 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 **Riverdale 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 the Riverdale School on September 28, 2004.

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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. 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 strong counseling program offered to all students. The district has an established relationship with New Bridge Counseling Center. This center provides students with 40-minute group programs in first, second, third, fourth, sixth and eighth grades to assist in dealing with social and emotional issues.

The district is also commended for the high number of students with disabilities who have scored in the proficient range on the NJ ASK and GEPA statewide assessments. In 2004, 83.3% of the students with disabilities scored proficient on the Math and

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Language Arts sections of the NJASK 4. 100% of students with disabilities scored proficient on the Language Arts section of the NJASK 3. Over 66.7% of students with disabilities scored proficient or advanced proficient on the Math section and over 66.6% of scored proficient or advanced proficient on the Science section of the GEPA.

Data Summary:

Based on a review of the data, the district is educating over 58% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. Additionally, almost all students with disabilities are educated within the district; less than 5% of students are in private placements. However, the district has placed nearly all 3 and 4-year-old pre-school students with disabilities in restrictive settings such as private special education schools or in the pre-school disabled program. The district has identified pre-school continuum as an area of concern and has a sufficient plan to address this area of need.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Reevaluation, 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of programs and the related services of occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of hearing aid procedure, extended school year determination, IEPs containing goals and objectives for special education and related services, provision for the related service of speech and transfer procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parent policy, components of notice of meeting for transition meetings, documentation of efforts to secure parental participation at meetings, written notice and

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meetings conducted in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of the referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings, timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find ages 3-21, health summaries and date stamping new referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments and reports signed and dated for students eligible for special education and related service.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of bilingual evaluations, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech and language services, acceptance or rejection of outside evaluations and multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech language services.

An additional areas of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility statements in evaluation reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Speech and Language Reports - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that evaluation reports do not include eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that eligibility determinations are not included in speech language evaluation reports. Implementation of these activities will ensure that eligibility is determined by a properly configured IEP team at an eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings and participants and statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the areas of copy of evaluation reports 10 days prior to eligibility meeting, child study team members certifying in writing that report represents conclusions and eligibility requirements for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of ninety day timelines, provision of IEP prior to implementation, implementation of preschool program by age 3, IEP implementation, parental observation of proposed placement, IEP considerations and required statements, input in IEP from secondary setting staff, IEPs revised with required components and provision of annual review IEP prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding present levels of educational performance (PLEP) for students eligible for speech language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP)– During the on-site visit, it was determined that IEPs for students eligible for speech language services did not contain sufficient PLEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students eligible for speech language services address the present levels of educational performance with all required components. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the IEP team can determine appropriate goals, objectives, accommodations, modifications, strategies and any other appropriate services to address the individual learning needs of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision making process, LRE documentation, general education access in district for school age students, notification and participation to students in out-of-district programs and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum of programs for preschool students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of preschool transition planning conference and placement in preschool by age 3. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section X: Transition to Adult Life

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual assessments for post secondary outcomes and statement of transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Riverdale School District serves the K-8 population and is age 16 transition is not applicable.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting and procedural safeguards.

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

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Section XII: Statewide Assessments

Summary of Findings:

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

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

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

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

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Riverdale School District on December 10, 2004. 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 acknowledged 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.

The district is commended for inclusive practices which have resulted in a significant amount of students with special needs being educated in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day for school aged students. Additional data regarding performance on the statewide assessments indicates a high percentage of students with disabilities scoring proficient or advanced proficient on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, Grade 4 (NJASK 4) mathematics and language arts literacy sections, NJASK 3 language arts section and the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) mathematics and science sections.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. However, a significant amount of parents expressed their concern with the administrator having a dual role as both the school principal and Director of Special Services. Parents also expressed their frustration over the lack of related service providers during the summer and fall of 2004.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of programs and services, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, independent evaluations, referral process, pre-referral process, direct referrals, vision and hearing screening, identification meetings, participants and timelines, standardized assessments, written reports, for students eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, statement of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, present levels of educational performance for students eligible for special education and related services, annual review timelines, decision making process for students 6-21, regular education access in district for students 6-21, continuum of programs for school aged students, notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural safeguards participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessment, IEP requirements at age 14, class sizes, age ranges, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding hearing aids, extended school year determination, goals and objectives for programs and services, provision of related service of speech, transfer procedures, surrogate parent policy, notice of meeting for transition, documentation of parental participation in a meeting, written notice, native language, child find ages 3-21, health summary, date stamping referrals, bilingual evaluations, functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of outside evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents, team members certifying their findings in reports, eligibility requirements, ninety day timelines, IEP to parents prior to implementation, implementation of program by age 3, IEP implementation, parental observation of proposed placement, considerations and required statements, secondary school input in 8th grade IEP, IEP revision components, provision of annual review IEP prior to implementation, placement in LRE for preschool students, preschool transition conference, individuals assessments for post secondary outcomes, age 14 transitions service needs, documentation to case manager, CST knowledge of statewide assessments and access to records.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding eligibility statements in speech reports and present levels of educational performance for students eligible for speech language services.

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