

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

District: Rockaway Borough

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: December 9 and 10, 2003

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Rockaway Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Rockaway Borough 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 Rockaway Borough 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 Thomas Jefferson School cafeteria on December 3, 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 school 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 charter school's special education administrators, building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its various assistance programs such as the Homework Assistance Program which meets after school four days a week. In addition to helping all students with their homework assignments, the program also provides instruction to assist students in acquiring organizational skills. The success of this

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

program was demonstrated when special education students made it to the finals in the Geography Bee and the Social Studies Olympiad.

The district is also commended for improving peer interactions by implementing a weekly social skills group and through the Second Step Program that targets character education.

The district also initiated the Willow Tree Club that serves to build self-esteem by having club members provide peer tutoring to lower grade children.

The district has developed a particularly unique activity in an effort to provide new staff members with a better understanding of the community at large. A member of the historical society takes each new staff member on a bus tour of the district. This enables the staff members to better understand the needs of their students and provides them with the opportunity to incorporate local history into their lesson planning. As a result, students are better able to comprehend events in the world around them by relating these events to their own history.

Additionally the district is commended for their strong character education program and the positive reinforcement provided by their "Rambucks" program. Rambucks are awarded to students by staff for good citizenship and can be spent on special social activities such as roller-skating or movies. Any leftover "bucks" can be used at the end of the year assembly in a drawing for prizes.

Data Summary:

The school district's data indicate that their classification rate is 11.7% which is lower than the state's average of 13.9% for the 2002 school year. The district rate dropped to 11.3% for the year 2003. The amount of time special education students spend with their general education peers is higher than the state's average - 54.5% are in general education more than 80% of the time as compared to the state's average of 41.6%. A review of preschool data indicates placement with nondisabled peers has increased over last year's data. The district recognizes a need to increase their number of preschool students in general education settings and has submitted a plan to do so in response to program effectiveness findings in Part One.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition, 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 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, related services, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

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 themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of written notice, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notices of meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this concern. Activities have been implemented by the district to bring this area into compliance.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas and the district has implemented activities to bring this area into compliance.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety-day timelines, provision of the IEP to parents and teacher access and knowledge.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of written notice prior to implementation dates. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this concern.

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

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of Oberti factors, considerations and documentation of supplementary aids and services, regular education access and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making and notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of suspension tracking, documentation to the case manager and documentation of manifestation determination meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

Section XIII: Graduation is not applicable in this Preschool to Eighth Grade District

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time for general education and special education teachers and the need to have a district procedure to facilitate entry of students residing in state facilities into the district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Rockaway Borough School District on December 9 and 10, 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 outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas of need and for developing an improvement plan that requires no revision. The district is further commended for the implementation of activities to bring about correction in some of the identified areas prior to the on-site visit and 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 review of district data indicates the district is providing services to a significant percentage of special education students in the regular education setting. Though most preschool students are placed in segregated settings, the district has activities in their improvement plan to increase the number of preschool students who receive services in general education preschool classes.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. Concerns were expressed by several parents regarding the ninety-day timeline for completion of initial evaluations. This area was determined to be systemically compliant 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 policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services, length of day and year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of written notices, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, accept or rejection of reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement and rationale, provision of a copy of evaluations to the parents ten days prior to the meeting, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core content curriculum standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, provision of IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, continuum, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, student and agency invitations, preschool transition planning conference, placement in program by age three, procedural safeguards, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior assessment, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of locations.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding notices of meetings, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, written notice prior to implementation of the IEP, individualized decision-making, notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic and extracurricular activities, suspension tracking, documentation to case manager, documentation of manifestation determination meetings, consultation time and procedure to facilitate entry of students residing in state facilities into the district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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