

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Rockaway Township School District

County: Morris

Monitoring Dates: January 24 and 30, 2006

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten and Vanessa Leonard

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Rockaway Township 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 Township 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 Rockaway Township 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. An interview was conducted with the district's special education administrator.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district's classification rate of 12.5%, was significantly below the state rate of 14.6%. Additionally, in 2004-2005 the district educated 45% of students with disabilities aged 6-21 in a general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, which exceeded the state average of 39.2% for that year. A further analysis of the data indicated that over the last three years, the district has consistently reduced the number of students in segregated settings to 3.5% for the 2004-2005 school year. This was considerably below the 2004-2005 state rate of 10.7%. While the percentage of students in a general education early childhood setting was lower than the state average, a review of records, and staff and parent interviews indicated that these decisions were based on individual student needs and that placement in the general

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education setting was considered for each student. The district has indicated that a positive relationship with the area community-based preschool programs has been developed in order to meet the needs of preschool children with disabilities when placement there is identified as appropriate.

Standard not Applicable

The Graduation standard and age 16 Transition requirements were not reviewed by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) because the district does not serve a population of students for which these requirements apply.

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, Free and Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessments, 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
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find Ages 3-21 ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Health summary ▪ Vision and hearing screening ▪ Identification meeting timelines ▪ Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Functional assessments ▪ Multidisciplinary evaluations ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria ▪ Signature of agreement/disagreement and rationale ▪ Copy of evaluation reports (ESERS) ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP required considerations and statements (ESERS) ▪ 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 and/or access) ▪ 90-day timelines
Transition to Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEPs for preschool students with disabilities implemented no later than age 3
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students ▪ Suspension tracking system ▪ IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days ▪ Procedures for determination of change in placement ▪ Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement ▪ Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan ▪ Interim Alternative Educational Settings

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Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address areas that have not yet been corrected.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral process and pre-referral interventions- Intervention and Referral Service team does not meet regularly and the process is not consistently followed. 	X		
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational impact statement and required components of speech evaluations- Speech-language specialists are unaware of the need to include an educational impact statement from the classroom teacher in a speech evaluation. Additionally, other required components are not consistently included in speech-language evaluations. 	X		
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS) - Speech-language specialists do not consistently provide copies of evaluations to parents. 			X
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP required considerations and components (ESLS) – The district does not document all required considerations and components. 			X
Transition to Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child study team participation in transition planning conference- Child study teams are not participating in preschool transition planning meetings. 	X		
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs”- Staff members are unaware of transition requirements. 	X		
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification of removal forwarded to case manager - When a student with a disability is suspended, the principal does not forward written notification of the removal to the case manager. • Short term removals that are not a change in placement – When school personnel determine that a removal is 	X		X

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Discipline (continued)	not a change in placement, a determination regarding the extent of services to be provided is not made. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manifestation determinations- Staff were not aware that this requirement needed to be documented in writing. 	X		

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit, interviews or record review.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Rockaway Township School District on January 24 and 30, 2006. 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need. The district is further acknowledged 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 for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district's classification rate of 12.5%, was significantly below the state rate of 14.6%. Additionally, in 2004-2005 the district educated 45% of students with disabilities aged 6-21 in a general education setting for more than 80% of the school day, which exceeded the state average of 39.2% for that year. A further analysis of the data indicated that over the last three years, the district has consistently reduced the number of students in segregated settings to 3.5% for the 2004-2005 school year. This was considerably below the 2004-2005 state rate of 10.7%. While the percentage of students in a general education early childhood setting was lower than the state average, a review of records, and staff and parent interviews indicated that these decisions were based on individual student needs and that placement in the general education setting was considered for each student. The district has indicated that a positive relationship with the area community-based preschool programs has been developed in order to meet the needs of preschool children with disabilities when placement there is identified as appropriate.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's variety of programs and services. Additionally, parents indicated that case managers and teachers are easily accessible and communicate regularly with them. Parents felt they were well informed and part of the decision making process regarding their children's placement and progress.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: General Provisions, Free, Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessments and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included child find ages 3-21, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, standardized assessments, functional assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations, bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators, eligibility meeting participants, statement of eligibility, eligibility criteria, signature of agreement/disagreement and rationale, copy of evaluation report to parents (ESERS), IEP meeting participants, IEP implementation dates, IEP provided to parents prior to implementation, IEP required considerations and statements (ESERS), IEP 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 and/or access), 90-day timelines, IEPs for preschool students with disabilities implemented no later than age 3, discipline procedures employed equitably for all students, suspension tracking system, IEP team meeting for first removal beyond

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10 days, procedures for determination of change in placement, short-term removals resulting in a change of placement, procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan and interim alternative educational settings.

Three areas originally identified by the district as non-compliant, but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS), IEP required considerations and components (ESLS) and written notification of suspension forwarded to case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the referral process, pre-referral interventions, educational impact statement (ESLS), required components of speech evaluations, child study team participation in preschool transition planning conference, beginning at age 14 IEP statement of transition service needs, short term removals that are not a change in placement and manifestation determinations.

The on-site visit identified no additional areas of need within the various standards.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process and no revisions to the district's improvement plan were required. Verification of implementation of the plan will be conducted by the County Office of Education.