

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

District: Rutherford Public School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: September 10 and 11, 2002

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright and Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Rutherford Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Rutherford Public 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 Rutherford Public 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 Rutherford High School, on September 9, 2002. 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 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 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 its commitment to educating elementary students in technology and for offering world language instruction in French, Latin and Spanish.

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A significant number of students participate in extracurricular activities that include vocal and instrumental music. These activities begin at the elementary level and continue through the secondary level.

The district provides a comprehensive variety of course selections ranging from vocational courses to advanced placement college courses at the high school. Students can also become certified in Cisco systems. The high school has been awarded Blue Ribbon status and participates in New Jersey Teacher Recognition Programs.

The district also provides their staff with in-service workshops through their MAC College and through a collaborative effort with the New Milford Public Schools.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures, professional/parent development and dissemination of IDEA information. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 area of certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, related services for occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, transportation and speech therapy, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities and staffing. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of length of the school day and year, transfer students and staffing.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the

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district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of notices of meetings, written notice, meetings and native language. The district has adopted the state approved notices and state IEP format. The district further identified concerns in the area of obtaining consent. No improvement plan was submitted. The district needs to revise its improvement plan include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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 direct referrals, health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral interventions, referral process, summer referrals and identification meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of identification meeting timelines. The district did not submit an improvement plan. The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation planning meeting and participants at the planning meeting.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and turning age five. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of eligibility and the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings, participants and criteria. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, alignment of goals and objectives to the core curriculum standards, age of majority, IEP implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, teacher knowledge and access of IEPs and provision of copies of IEPs to parents prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines and teacher knowledge and access to IEPs.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation and the continuum. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in the area of nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests and age sixteen needed transition 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by the age of three.

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 area of interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of discipline procedures, documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plan and functional behavioral assessment and manifestation determination. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP documentation and alternate assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications and

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child study team knowledge of content, accommodations and modifications. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of IEP requirements.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of choice of diploma, out-of-district participation in graduation and written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size waivers, collaboration time and sufficient staffing. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in the areas of collaboration time and staffing.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of locations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Rutherford Public School District on September 10 and 11, 2002. 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, a number of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents did raise concerns regarding continuity and consistency of staff, facilities limitations and their desire for in-service on a variety of special education subjects. Parents also expressed concerns with the post-school transition process as they feel that it does not address the individual needs of the students. Concerns were raised regarding general education staff knowledge of appropriate modifications and their implementation. Parents did express satisfaction with the preschool transition process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included certifications, direct referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, reevaluation planning meetings, participants at reevaluation meetings, statement of eligibility, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents for students eligible for special education and related services, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by the age of three, interim alternative educational setting, IEP documentation of statewide assessment, alternate assessment, graduation IEP requirements, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction approvals and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding general provisions, extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, staffing, procedural safeguards, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, evaluations, reevaluation timelines, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria for eligibility, IEP components, least restrictive environment components, post secondary school transition, discipline procedures, documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations/modifications, child study team knowledge of content/modifications, choice of diploma, out-of-district graduation participation, written notice of graduation, class size waivers, collaboration time, staffing, parent and adult student access to records, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of locations.

The on-site visit did not identify any additional areas of need.

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