

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Saddle River School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: May 23, 2006

Monitoring Team: Jenifer Spear and Michelle Fenwick

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Saddle River School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Saddle River 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 Saddle River 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. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities, as reported in December 2005, indicated that the district's classification rate was 15.01%, excluding students classified as eligible for speech-language services, which was above the state rate of 14.85% for that same year. During the same school year, the district educated 73% of school aged students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was significantly above the state average of 42% for that year. The district also reported in December 2005 that 20% of preschool students with disabilities were educated in either a full-time or part-time general education setting. This rate was below the state average of 26.6% for that year. The district identified

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continuum of programs for preschool students with disabilities as an area of need during the self-assessment process and developed activities to correct the noncompliance.

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
- Reevaluation
- Transition to Preschool
- Transition to Adult Life
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the district'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 • Provision of programs • Provision of related services • Transfer procedures
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent • Implementation without undue delay • Provision of notice of a meeting • Meetings • Provision of written notice • Content of written notice • Notices in native language • Interpreters at meetings • Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct referrals • Identification meeting timelines
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary evaluations • Educational impact statement (ESLS) • Standardized assessments • Functional assessments (ESERS) • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Eligibility criteria • Signature of agreement and disagreement and rationale (ESERS) • Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability) • Copy of evaluation report to parents (ESERS)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Implementation dates • 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) • 90-day timelines
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of LRE decisions (ages 6-21) • Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district • Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs (ages 6-21) • Placement decisions based on students' individual needs (ages 6-21)

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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 table includes the results of the review of the district's improvement plan and identifies those areas where correction of noncompliance was verified during the on-site visit.

Section	Area	Compliance Review
Free, Appropriate Public Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extended school year – the district indicated a need to expand extended school year opportunities for preschool students. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area.
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content of notice of a meeting – the district indicated a need in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Notice does not indicate that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss transition, when appropriate. ○ Notice does not clearly indicate that the purpose of the meeting may be to develop an IEP, if appropriate. ○ Notices for speech do not include required components. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area.
Location, Referral and Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find ages 3-21– the district indicated that Child Find activities lacked reference to migrant and homeless children. ▪ Referral process – the district indicated that there is a need to review and revise the referral process for both speech and child study team referrals. ▪ Pre-referral interventions – the district indicated a need to revise Intervention and Referral Service procedures. ▪ Health summary and vision and hearing screenings – the district indicated the need to establish a procedure to ensure that health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are conducted by the nurse and results are forwarded to the child study team prior to identification meetings. ▪ Identification meeting participants – the district indicated that there may be a need for increased staffing to ensure appropriate participants at identification meetings. 	<p>The district demonstrated compliance in this area.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient</p> <p>The district demonstrated compliance in this area.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Functional assessments (ESLS) – the district indicated that speech-language evaluators do not include results of observations and interviews. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area.

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Section	Area	Compliance Review
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale – the district indicated that there is no eligibility report for speech-language referrals. ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS) – the district indicated that speech-language specialists are not sending copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. 	<p>The district demonstrated compliance in this area.</p> <p>The district demonstrated compliance in this area.</p>
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP required considerations and components – the district indicated that child study team members and speech-language specialists need additional training in the development of compliant IEPs. 	<p>The district demonstrated compliance in this area.</p>
Least Restrict Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuum of programs – the district indicated the need to consider the development of a preschool program option within the district to meet the needs of its students. Individual decision making and placement based on individual needs will be reviewed when a full continuum is available for preschool students. 	<p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p>

Additional Areas of Need

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 Saddle River School District on May 23, 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 and develop an improvement plan that will bring about correction of noncompliance. 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.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities, as reported in December 2005, indicated that the district's classification rate was 15.01%, excluding students classified as eligible for speech-language services, which was above the state rate of 14.85% for that same year. During the same school year, the district educated 73% of school aged students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was significantly above the state average of 42% for that year. The district also reported in December 2005 that 20% of preschool students with disabilities were educated in either a full-time or part-time general education setting. This rate was below the state average of 26.6% for that year. The district identified continuum of programs for preschool students with disabilities as an area of need during the self-assessment process and developed activities to correct the noncompliance.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- Transition to Preschool
- Transition to Adult Life
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation
- Provision of programs
- Provision of related services
- Transfer procedures
- Consent
- Implementation without undue delay
- Provision of notice of a meeting
- Meetings
- Provision of written notice
- Content of written notice
- Notices in native language
- Interpreters at meetings
- Independent evaluations
- Direct referrals
- Identification meeting timelines
- Multi-disciplinary evaluations
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)
- Standardized assessments
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- Eligibility meeting participants
- Eligibility criteria
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale (ESERS)
- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESERS)
- IEP meeting participants
- Implementation dates
- IEP provided to parents 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)
- 90-day timelines
- Documentation of LRE decisions
- Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district
- Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs (ages 6-21)
- Placement decisions based on students' individual needs (ages 6-21)

Areas of need originally identified by the district, but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit, by the NJDOE included:

- Extended school year
- Content of notice of a meeting
- Child Find ages 3-21
- Health summary
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Functional assessments (ESLS)
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale (ESLS)
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS)
- IEP required considerations and components

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding:

- Referral process
- Pre-referral interventions
- Identification meeting participants
- Continuum of programs (preschool)

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit. The district is expected to implement the activities in the district's improvement plan to achieve compliance within six months of the date of this report. The district is also expected to conduct ongoing administrative oversight, as well as provide training and technical assistance as needed, in response to changes in local procedures and federal and state regulations in order to maintain compliance. Verification of compliance will be conducted by the County Office of Education.