

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Sayreville School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: October 31, 2003 and January 21, 2004

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Michelle Davis-Young, Stephen Coplin,
Vanessa Leonard and Deborah Masarsky

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Sayreville School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Sayreville 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 Sayreville 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 Sayreville Middle School on October 14, 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 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the Rainbow Program at the Truman School. This program, open to both regular and special education students, promotes acceptance and tolerance through a variety of activities. In addition, the district fosters a sense of community pride through the Willow Program. This program encourages positive peer relations and interactions through planned community service programs.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Discipline, Statewide Assessment, 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.

Data Summary:

During the 2002-2003 school year, 30.7% of classified students were placed in a general education setting for more than 80% of the day. While this is below state average, it does represent a 6.2% increase from the 2000-2001 school year. During the self-assessment process the district recognized the need for more placement options for students in preschool and school age programs and developed an improvement plan to address this area of need.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of dissemination of public information and approved policies and procedures.

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

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 areas of length of school day/year, transfer students and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of speech and occupational therapy and the development of goals and objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

During the on-site monitoring an issue regarding facilities was identified. The county office will be notified of this issue and will determine if further action is appropriate.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of independent evaluations, interpreters at meetings and age of majority.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notices, notices in native language, surrogate parents and written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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, summer referrals, and participants at identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of vision and hearing screenings and health summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find, 20-day timelines and the referral process.

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that the district's child find activities are not conducted throughout the community and do not address highly mobile populations within the community because they were unaware the procedures lacked these components. As a result, the district failed to identify this as an area of need during self-assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure Child Find activities include community outreach and address those highly mobile populations within the district. This will ensure that all students who may need special education and related services are identified and referred to the district. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Referral Process - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews that the district does not have a referral process at the high school. Administrators at the high school have recognized the need for an Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) Committee at the high school and have begun to develop the necessary procedures. On February 9, 2004, the high school is conducting in-service training on the referral process.

- **The district will submit the developed I&RS procedures for the high school as well as the agenda from the February 9, 2004 in-service training to demonstrate the implementation of activities to address this area of need.**

20-Day Timelines - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that the district does not consistently conduct identification meetings within the required 20-day timeline.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district conducts identification meetings within the 20-day timeline. Implementation of these activities will ensure the timely review of available data to determine the need for an evaluation. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations and functional assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Multi-Disciplinary Evaluations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that speech therapists are not including a teacher impact statement in their evaluation reports for students eligible for speech/language services because they were not aware of the code requirement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluation reports developed for those students eligible for speech/language services include the educational impact statement from the classroom teacher which serves to fulfill the requirement of a multi-disciplinary evaluation.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that child study team members are not including prior interventions when conducting a functional assessment as part of a child study team evaluation because they were not aware of the code requirement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure child study team members include prior interventions when conducting a functional assessment.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, parental consent and reevaluation prior to June 30th of a student's last year in preschool.

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at reevaluation planning meetings for students in the preschool disabled program.

Area(s) of Need:

Participants at Reevaluation Planning Meeting - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that regular education teachers do not consistently attend the reevaluation planning meetings for students currently placed in the preschool disabled program who are transitioning to a school age program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a regular education teacher attends the reevaluation planning meeting of students in the preschool disabled program. Implementation of these activities will ensure the members of the IEP team make decisions based on information obtained from all required members of the team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting, notice of eligibility, participants and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of copy of evaluation reports to parents and agreement/disagreement with eligibility determination. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives aligned with core content curriculum standards, implementation dates and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP components, considerations and required statements, annual review timelines, attendance of vocational staff for shared time students, copy of IEP to parents and IEP in effect at the beginning of the school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at IEP meetings.

Area(s) of Need:

IEP Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that regular education teachers do not consistently attend IEP meetings for those students in the preschool disabled program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure a regular education teacher attends IEP meetings of students in the preschool disabled program. The attendance of a regular education teacher at these meetings will ensure that students receive the benefit of an appropriately configured IEP team to make program and placement decisions. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access to regular education, least restrictive environment documentation, individualized decision making and supplementary aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum of placement options and notification of extracurricular nonacademic activities to students in out-of-district placements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 statement of transition service needs, age 16 statement of needed transition services, IEP considerations and agency involvement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age 3.

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 areas of access, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of other locations of student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Student Records in Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that the district does not identify the location of other student records in the central files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include an activity to ensure that the central file documents the location of other student records maintained by the district. The implementation of this activity will ensure that parents and/or adult students are made aware of the location of other records maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Sayreville School District on January 21, 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 this review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with revisions will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further 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.

While the district has increased the number of students placed in general education setting over the last three years, it remains an area of concern. Review of data indicated that the percentage of students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day in the Sayreville School District is below the state average. The district recognizes the need for more placement options for students in both preschool and school age programs and developed an improvement plan to address this area of need.

At a focus group meeting, attended by 16 parents, held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed concerns that there were not enough inclusion opportunities available for students at the middle and high school levels. In addition, parents felt that the regular education teachers at all levels have not received sufficient staff development training in inclusion techniques. Parents would like to see improved communication with case managers and teachers and would like to receive more information about their children's disability. Transition and post-secondary opportunities is an area of concern for many parents, as is preparation for statewide assessments. Parents stated that the administration is the main barrier to the increasing of funding and additional programs for special education students.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, transfer students, certifications, independent evaluations, interpreters at meetings, , direct referrals, summer referrals, participants at identification meetings, consent, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, parental consent, reevaluation prior to June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility meeting, notice of eligibility, participants, documentation of eligibility, goals and objectives aligned with core content curriculum standards, implementation dates and age of majority, access to regular education, least restrictive environment documentation, individualized decision making, supplementary aids and services, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disabled program by age 3, access, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, provision of speech and occupational therapy, development of goals and objectives for related services, content of notices, notices in native language, surrogate parents, written notice, vision and hearing screenings, health summaries, acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations, reevaluation timelines, copy of evaluation reports to parents, acceptance/rejection of eligibility determination, IEP components, considerations and required statements, annual review timelines, attendance of vocational staff for shared time students, copy of IEP to parents, IEP in effect at the beginning of the school year, continuum of placement options, notification of

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

extracurricular nonacademic activities to students in out-of-district placements, age 14 statement of transition service needs, age 16 statement of needed transition services, IEP considerations and agency involvement.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding child find activities, the referral process, 20-day timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments, meeting participants and the documentation of other locations of student records.

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