

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

District: Sea Isle City School District **County:** Cape May

Monitoring Dates: September 27, 2004 and April 25, 2005

Monitoring Team: Michael J. Lee and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Sea Isle City School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Sea Isle City School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Sea Isle City 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 monitoring activities, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Sea Isle City Public Elementary School on the evening of September 22, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the on-site monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the OSEP 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 chief school administrator/principal, the special education director/learning disabilities teacher consultant, general education and special education teachers, related services providers, the school nurse, and the child study team school psychologist. Additional parent interviews were conducted by telephone.

District Strengths:

The Sea Isle City School District is commended for its successful STAR (Stop, Think, Analyze and Respond) program which benefits all students by fostering positive behavior and appropriate social problem-solving within the classrooms. This cooperative and supportive atmosphere is further promoted by the district's Character Education Curriculum, a mentoring program, involving staff and community members,

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the Peer Mediation program, facilitated by third through eighth grade students, and the Building Bridges program, which is an intergenerational club bringing senior citizens and students together to build stronger communication skills.

Data Summary:

For the past three years, the Sea Isle City School District's classification rate of students requiring special education and related services has been above the state average and rising. During the current school year, 20.5% of the district's resident enrollment was found eligible for special education and related services compared to the state average of 14.6%.

A review of placement data for the past three years indicates that Sea Isle City School District is including students with disabilities in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day. This current school year 64.9 % of the students (or 24 of the 37 classified students) are with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day and 29.7% (or 11 out of 37 classified students) are in general education classes between 40 and 80% of the day. Though this is significantly higher than the state average of 41.6%, it should be noted that the district has identified concerns regarding student-based decision-making, continuum of options, and provision of programs and services as barriers to appropriate placement decisions.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding professional development. **The district's plan is insufficient to address this issue because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures and practices discussed. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

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 facilities and certification.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of services for classified students in out of district programs, IEP goals and objectives, length of school day, extended school year, and provision of IEP. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns

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regarding the availability of programs and services, provision of related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP implementation and implementation dates, frequency, location and duration of related services.

Areas of Need:

IEP Implementation – Parent and staff interviews, observations and record review indicated that IEPs are not consistently implemented as written. Scheduling problems, availability of programs or staff, and/or changes in the program prior to conducting an IEP team meeting often results in an inappropriate classroom placement, no provision of supplementary aids and services, and no provision of related services, as required by the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the case manager monitors the implementation of the IEP and that staff members have clearly defined responsibilities regarding the IEP. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. Implementation of these activities will ensure all students receive the educational program and related service(s) required by their IEPs. Additionally, these activities will ensure the appropriateness of programs and services is reviewed on an ongoing basis and changed when needed through the IEP process.**

Implementation Dates, Frequency, Location and Duration of Related Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district does not consistently document the implementation dates, frequency, location and duration of related services. Furthermore, the IEP often utilizes ranges to identify frequency (e.g., 1 to 2 times) and duration (e.g., 20 to 30 minutes). As a result, it is unclear when, where or for how long the service will be provided or the criteria that is being used to determine the frequency and duration.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to procedures to ensure that the IEP team identifies specific implementation dates, frequency, duration and location of all related services. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student receives the related services the IEP team has determined are necessary to derive full educational benefit from the student's educational program.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, notices in native language, and interpreters.

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During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings, meetings, written notices, and independent evaluations. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding Child Find and referral process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation of child study team members at identification meetings.

Area of Need:

Participation of Child Study Team Members – Record review and parent and staff interviews indicated that, when a preschool age or school age student is referred for an initial evaluation, the full child study team is not in attendance at the initial identification meeting, along with a parent and general education teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the full child study team participates in identification meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure the appropriate participants are in attendance at meetings and are involved in the decision-making process regarding the need for an evaluation. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant 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 multidisciplinary evaluations and written reports for student potentially eligible for special education and related services.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding standardized assessments and written reports for students potentially eligible for speech/language services. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding the provision of bilingual evaluations and documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's

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improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. Additionally, the district identified concerns regarding functional assessment. **The district's plan is insufficient because it lacks training and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these activities.**

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 compliance in the areas of reevaluation planning meeting and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines, reevaluation conducted sooner than three years, and reevaluation completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding consent for reevaluation and implementing an action without undue delay for which parental consent was granted. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks activities and an administrative oversight component to ensure that upon receipt of consent to conduct an assessment as part of a reevaluation, the district will, without delay, initiate the appropriate assessments and conduct an eligibility meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure that eligibility decisions are based on current existing data and, if appropriate, new assessment information. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these components.** Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding reevaluation conducted when a change in eligibility is considered. **The district did not submit plans to address this area and needs to do so.**

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 eligibility meeting and statement of eligibility.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding eligibility participants, required assessments for determining the eligibility category of autistic, and copies of evaluation reports to parents at least ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified.

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, annual review timelines, age of majority, and teacher knowledge and access.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP meeting participants, signatures representing actual participants, provision of IEP to parent, implementation of IEP, and 90-day timelines. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in these areas.

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 areas of supplementary aids and services, general education access, and notification and participation of students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding continuum of options, the least restrictive environment decision-making process, considerations and documentation. Although the district identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in 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 areas of early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three and agency involvement.

During self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding child study team participation in preschool transition planning conferences. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

Although the Sea Isle City School District only provides services to students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade, during self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding age fourteen transition service needs, particularly in the inclusion of student preferences and interests, courses of study, and involvement and technical consultation from outside agencies. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding documentation of removal to case manager and suspension tracking. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks procedures and administrative oversight to ensure that case managers are informed of suspensions to accurately track removals and thus to ensure students are provided educational services on the eleventh day of removal from the program. The plan must be revised to include these components.** The district further identified concerns regarding functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, and manifestation determination. **The district did not submit a plan to address these areas of need and needs to do so.**

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 area of student participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications and the process for exemption from passing.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding alternative proficiency assessments. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Sea Isle City School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade and is not required to address issues of graduation.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of common planning time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns regarding child study team personnel. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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 sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of access to records. Although the district identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already brought about correction in this area.

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 Sea Isle City School District on September 27, 2004 and April 25, 2005. 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 that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a public focus group meeting, six parents participated and expressed some satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Parents commented positively on the academically challenging instruction, the inclusion of IEP goals and objectives, and the range of special education programs and services considered for their children. Parents noted that budgetary constraints and an overall lack of program options are significant barriers at IEP meetings. Concerns were expressed regarding provision of IEP prior to implementation, required IEP team members do not participate in the process, sections of the IEP are left blank, inaccurate present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives are not aligned to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and related services do not start at the beginning of the school year or extend to the end of the school year. Parents acknowledged recent improvements in special education policies and procedures, scheduling, delivery of services, and communication between the school and home.

For the past three years, the district's placement data indicates that Sea Isle City School District is including students with disabilities in general education classes for more than 80% of the school day.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included facilities, certification, surrogate parents, notices in native language, interpreters, multidisciplinary evaluations, written reports for students who are eligible for special education and related services, reevaluation planning meeting and participants, eligibility meeting, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, annual review timelines, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access, supplementary aids and services, general education access, notification and participation of students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, interim alternative educational settings, student participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, the process for exemption from passing, class size, age range, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, availability of programs and services, provision of related services, transfer students, Child Find, referral process, provision of bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, functional assessment, consent for reevaluation, undue delay in implementing action for which consent was given, reevaluation for change in eligibility, documentation of disciplinary removal,

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suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral interventions plans, and manifestation determination.

The district corrected many areas of need prior to the on-site visit in April of 2005, including policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of services for out-of-district students, IEP goals and objectives, length of school day, extended school year, provision of IEP, notices of meetings, meetings, written notices, independent evaluations, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, standardized assessments, evaluation reports for students potentially eligible for speech-language services, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation conducted sooner than three years, reevaluation completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool, eligibility participants, required assessments for determining the eligibility category of autistic, copies of evaluation reports to parents at least ten days prior to the eligibility meeting, IEP meeting participants, signatures of IEP participants, provision of IEP to parents, implementation of IEP, 90 day timelines, continuum of options, the least restrictive environment decision-making process, considerations and documentation, child study team participation in preschool transition planning conferences, age fourteen transition service needs, particularly in the inclusion of student preferences and interests, courses of study, alternative proficiency assessments, child study team personnel child study team personnel, and access to records. These findings were verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring activities.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding oversight of IEP implementation, implementation dates, frequency, location and duration of related services, and participation of child study team members at identification meetings.

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