

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

District: Somerdale

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: December 7, 2005

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Somerdale School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Somerdale 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 Somerdale 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 State 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, 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 therapists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data indicates that 80 students with disabilities were enrolled in the Somerdale School District in 2005. The district educated 52.1% (38) of students with disabilities, ages 6-21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is above the state average of 42% for that year. Of the district's three preschool students with disabilities, ages three to five, one student was educated in a general education early childhood class within the district and two students were educated in the special education early childhood class and attended the general education early childhood class for some activities. The district placed two students in private day schools. The district's classification rate for the 2005-2006 school year was 11.50% as compared to the state classification average of 14.85%.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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;
- Evaluation;
- Reevaluation;
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE);
- Transition;
- Statewide Assessments and
- Graduation Requirements.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas 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
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation ▪ Extended school year ▪ Provision of programs ▪ Provision of related services
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consent ▪ Implementation without undue delay ▪ Provision of notice of a meeting ▪ Content of notice of a meeting ▪ Meetings ▪ Provision of written notice ▪ Content of written notice ▪ Interpreters at meetings ▪ Independent evaluations
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find ages 3-21 ▪ Referral process ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Health summary ▪ Vision and hearing screenings ▪ Identification meeting timelines ▪ Identification meeting participants

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

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ IEP required considerations and components ▪ 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 ▪ 90 day timelines
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suspension tracking system ▪ Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students ▪ IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days ▪ Procedures for determination of change in placement ▪ Procedures for development of behavior intervention plan ▪ Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement ▪ Short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided ▪ Interim Alternative Educational Settings ▪ Manifestation determinations
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class size ▪ Age range ▪ Group size

Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an ‘X’ in the ‘Needs Revision’ column:

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transfer Procedures – The child study team does not document the immediate review of the student file. 	X		
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notices in native language – The district does not provide notice of a meeting and written notice in the native language of the parents. 	X		

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

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions – The district does not provide sufficient interventions in general education programs and does not maintain documentation of interventions attempted and their effectiveness. 	X		
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents – The district does not consistently provide parents with copies of evaluation reports 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. 			X
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs) – The district does not consistently inform all staff with educational responsibility of their role in implementing the IEP. 	X		
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of removal forwarded to case manager – The district does not consistently forward written notification of suspensions with a description of the reasons to the case manager. 			X
Programs & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common planning time–Special education teachers do not have sufficient time to consult with the general education staff. 	X		

Additional Areas of Need

Through the self-assessment process, the Somerdale School District identified the areas in need of improvement. The NJDOE did not identify additional areas as noncompliant.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Somerdale School District on December 7, 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 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 systemic change. 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 ages 6-21 indicates that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district educated 52.1% of students with disabilities (38 students) in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is above the state average of 42% for that year. Of the district's three preschool students with disabilities, ages three to five, one student was educated in a general education early childhood class within the district and two students were educated in the special education early childhood class and attended the general education early childhood class for some activities. The district's classification rate for the 2005-2006 school year was 11.50% as compared to the state classification average of 14.85%.

During interviews conducted with parents by telephone, all of the parents contacted expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. The majority of the parents interviewed felt that they were part of the IEP team and that their opinions were valued when planning for their children's education.

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

- General Provisions;
- Evaluation;
- Reevaluation;
- Least Restrictive Environment;
- Transition;
- Statewide Assessments; and
- Graduation Requirements.

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

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation;
- Extended school year;
- Provision of programs;
- Provision of related services;
- Consent;
- Implementation without undue delay;
- Provision of notice of a meeting;
- Content of notice of a meeting;
- Meetings;
- Provision of written notice;
- Content of written notice;
- Interpreters at meetings;
- Independent evaluations;
- Child Find ages 3-21;
- Referral process;
- Direct Referrals;
- Health summary;
- Vision and hearing screenings;
- Identification meeting timelines;
- Identification meeting participants;

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- Eligibility meeting participants;
- Eligibility criteria;
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale;
- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability);
- IEP meeting participants;
- IEP required considerations and components;
- 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;
- 90 day timelines;
- Suspension tracking system;
- Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students;
- IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days;
- Procedures for determination of change in placement;
- Procedures for development of behavior intervention plan;
- Short-term removals resulting in a change of placement;
- Short-term removals that are not a change in placement—school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided;
- Interim Alternative Educational Settings;
- Manifestation determination;
- Class size;
- Age range; and
- Group size.

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:

- Copy of evaluation reports to parents; and
- Notification of removal is forwarded to case manager.

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

- Transfer procedures;
- Notices in native languages;
- Pre-referral interventions;
- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs);
- Notification of removal forwarded to case manager; and
- Common planning time.

No additional areas of need within the various standards were identified during the on-site visit; therefore, no revisions to the improvement plan submitted in July 2005 are required. The plan will be submitted for final approval and compliance in the areas identified in the self-assessment will be verified by the County Office of Education.