

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

District: Somerset County Vocational School District

County: Somerset

Monitoring Dates: May 13, 2003

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky, Stephen A. Coplin and Kim Murray

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Somerset County Vocational School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Somerset County Vocational 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 Somerset County Vocational 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 Somerset Vocational High School on May 6, 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 and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principal, vice-principal general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its involvement with “**Communications Workers of America Apprenticeship Program.**” Both regular and special education students participate in career exploration activities and develop job skills while apprenticing in various job experiences. Students are provided job coaches and have the opportunity to

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

create a resume, receive career counseling and be recruited for post-secondary employment.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records 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.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent training, policies/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of professional development for regular and special education teachers regarding positive behavioral supports and effective transition practices. The district did not submit activities to address these areas of need. **The district needs to develop activities to address that include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

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 provision of programs, length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of extended school year. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district now considers extended school year for each student at IEP meetings and documents the consideration in the IEP. The district further identified a concern in the area of the provision of counseling as a related service. The district did not submit activities to address this area of need. **The district needs to develop activities that 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.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, content/provision of notices, notices in native language, independent evaluations and interpreters at meetings.

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

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 identification meeting timelines with required participants and hearing/vision screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, referral procedures, pre-referral interventions, health summaries and identification of students who are at risk for not graduating. The district did not submit activities to address these areas of need. **The district needs to develop activities that include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of all or parts of reports and signed/dated reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with the child study team members that the district does not include interventions attempted as a component of the functional assessment for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district includes all required components of the functional assessment in evaluation reports in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d). 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 meetings with required participants, criteria, eligibility statements and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

Area(s) of Need:

Agreement/Disagreement with Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with child study team members that the district does not document agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, age of majority, implementation dates, meetings/participants, annual reviews, 90-day timelines, IEPs in effect at the beginning of the school year and provision of IEPs to parents/adult students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of the development of goals/objectives for academic subjects. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district now includes goals/objectives in students' IEPs. The district further identified a concern in the area of increasing teacher knowledge of the core curriculum content standards. During the on-site visit it was determined through staff interviews and document review that the teachers had weekly meetings throughout the year with the director to review core curriculum content standards and the alignment of these standards with IEP goals/objectives.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding teacher access to revised IEPs.

Area(s) of Need:

IEPs to Teachers - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although teachers receive copies of IEPs prior to the beginning of the school year, the district does not consistently provide copies of revised IEPs to teachers when IEP meetings take place during the school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that teachers are provided with copies of revised IEPs prior to implementation. 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 individualized decision-making process and participation of students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of continuum of programs regarding in-class support resource programs and other types of inclusion programs. Interviews with staff indicated that prior to the arrival of the new director, placement of students into these programs was limited because of insufficient staffing and limited training for regular education teachers. The district did not submit activities to address these areas of need. **The district needs to develop activities that include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of transition services, student/agency invitations, interests/preferences and transition statements.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of increasing student participation in post-secondary education, employment and community experiences. The district did not submit activities to address these areas of need. **The district needs to develop activities that include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool is not applicable in this high school district.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of positive behavioral intervention supports, procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students and the transmission of special education and disciplinary records to authorities. The district did not submit activities to address these areas of need. **The district needs to develop activities that include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Somerset County Vocational School District on May 13, 2003. 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 that review the district was able to identify all but a few areas of need. The district is further commended for the many areas verified as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, the two parents that attended expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and transition services. One parent explained that her son's increased self-esteem allowed him to make a presentation to his peers at an assembly. Both parents agreed that the school has been able to meet the individual needs of their children and has created an environment in which students not only succeed but thrive. The parent of a graduating senior expressed appreciation to the school for providing instruction in life skills as well as vocational and academic subjects, all of which, she believes, will make her son's transition to post-school life very successful.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included parent training, policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, provision of programs, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, consent, notices, meetings/participants, interpreters, independent evaluations, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings within timelines, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, evaluation reports signed/dated, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, reevaluation timelines, eligibility criteria, eligibility statements, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review/90-day timelines, IEPs in effect at the beginning of the school year, provision of IEPs to parents/adult students, individualized decision-making process, regular education access, provision of transition services, documentation of transition statements in IEPs, student/agency invitations to IEP meetings when transition will be discussed, documentation of suspensions to case managers, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative educational settings, participation in statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessments, accommodations and modifications in statewide assessments, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, documentation of graduation requirements, written notice of graduation, age range for special education classes, class/group size within code limits, consultation time between special and regular education teachers, student record access, maintenance/destruction of student records and documentation of other locations of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development regarding positive behavioral supports and effective transition practices, extended school year, provision of formalized counseling, surrogate parents, child find, the referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, identification of students at risk for not graduating, documentation in students' IEPs of goals/objectives for academic subjects, increasing teacher knowledge of the core curriculum content standards, continuum of programs, effectiveness of inclusive educational practices, student participation in post-secondary education, employment

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

and community experiences, positive behavioral intervention supports, procedural safeguard rights of potentially disabled students and transmission of special education and disciplinary records to authorities.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding functional assessments for student eligible for special education and related services, agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations and provision of IEPs to teachers prior to implementation.

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