

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

District: Somerset Hills School District

County: Somerset

Monitoring Dates: December 13 & 14, 2001

Monitoring Team: Paul Bilik, Barbara J. Tucker, Georgianna Parlacoski

Background Information

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Somerset Hills 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 Hills 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 Hills School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on November 27, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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 has implemented two outstanding programs that have been linked to maximize the benefits of both programs. These programs provide the opportunity for disabled students, non-disabled students and parents to increase their awareness and

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appreciation of issues in special education. The first program, Kids Rap, is a self-awareness and self-advocacy group comprised of students with disabilities. The purpose of this group is to afford students the opportunity to share information about the nature and impact of their own learning styles and to advocate for their own individual accommodations.

The second program is called the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). The purpose of this program is to facilitate communication throughout the school district on matters pertinent to special education, and to sponsor educational and informational sessions with speakers and other experts.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluations, Eligibility, Statewide Assessments, Graduation, 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.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Policies and Procedures and public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with in-service training for professional and paraprofessional staff. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the provision of a free and appropriate public education without delay, length of school day and year, participation in programs and activities with non-disabled peers, transfer students, extended school year and related services documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding adaptive physical education and availability of service providers. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an oversight component to ensure the implementation of these elements.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding approved facilities. This information has been provided to the county office.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, 20-day timelines, components of written notice, notice of a meeting, meeting participants and consent.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding documentation of attempts to obtain parental participation at meetings and 15-day timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the provision of notices to parents' in their native language, when feasible.

Areas of Need:

Notices in Native Language - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that although some copies of notices in students' files were in the parents' native language, other notices in the same files were in English.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure consistency in the provision of notices in the parents' native language, when feasible. The improvement plan must also include an in-service component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals and identification meetings.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding child find activities.

Areas of Need:

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Child Find Activities - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that although the district conducts an array of child find activities for students ages 3-5, the district does not conduct a sufficient amount of activities for students ages 6-21.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child find activities are sufficient to locate and refer all potentially disabled students between the ages of 3-21.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in written reports, standardized assessments, comprehensive evaluation by a multi-disciplinary team, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding parent interviews as part of the functional assessment. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need. The district further identified a concern regarding documentation of a student's current functioning. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an oversight component to ensure the implementation these elements.

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

Section VIII: IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation of the IEP, teacher access to IEPs, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and alignment of goals and objectives to the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding age of majority and accommodations and modifications for extra-curricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified a concern regarding the provision of a copy of the IEP to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an oversight component to ensure the implementation these elements.

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

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the placement of students in the least restrictive environment (LRE), LRE considerations and statements, continuum of programs, regular education access, supplemental aides and services and individualized decision-making.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of notices to out-of-district students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an oversight component to ensure the implementation of these elements.

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

Section X: Transition From School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in career guidance activities with non-disabled peers.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding agency invitations, identifying liaisons and utilizing additional steps for obtaining participation in transition planning. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding the statement of transition service needs, technical consultation from outside agencies, interagency linkages and needed transition services. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition from Early Intervention Programs (EIP) to preschool disabled by age 3 and implementing IEPs no later than age 3.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the preschool transition planning conference. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notification to case managers, development of a functional behavioral assessment plan and interventions, change in placement, and review and/or modification of the behavioral intervention plan. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these 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 Somerset Hills School District on December 13 & 14, 2001. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, 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.

At the focus group meeting approximately a dozen parents stated their satisfaction with the program options offered by the district, with the communication between themselves and their case managers, with the provision of related services and with the growth their children have made while in special education. Similar comments were made during the parent interview process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, public information, length of school day and year, related services, transfer students, extended school year, participation in programs and activities with non-disabled peers, surrogate parents, procedural safeguards, consent, independent evaluations, 20 day timelines, notice of meetings, components of written notice, referral process, pre-referral interventions, potentially disabled, health summary, vision and hearing screening, summer referrals, identification meetings, standardized assessments, comprehensive evaluations by a multi-disciplinary team, bilingual evaluations, acceptance or rejection of reports, 90 day timeline, meeting participants, teacher accessibility to IEPs, implementation of IEP, aligning goals and objectives with Core Curriculum Content Standards, annual review timelines, LRE statement and considerations, continuum of programs, regular education access, supplemental aids and services, individualized decision making, career guidance activities with non-disabled peers, EIP to PSD by age 3, implementation of IEP by age 3, discipline procedures, suspension tracking and interim alternate educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding adaptive physical education, vacancies of related service providers, staff development, securing parental participation at meetings, 15-day timeline, components of functional assessment, age of majority, accommodations and modifications for extra-curricular activities, behavioral intervention plans, provision to parents of the annual review, notices to out-of-district students, transition issues, written notification to case managers, functional behavioral assessment and manifestation determination meetings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, written notice in native languages and child find activities.

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Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.