

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

District: South Amboy School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: December 13, 14, 2001

**Monitoring Team: Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Stephen Coplin,
Deborah Marsarsky, Denise Wilkens**

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the South Amboy School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the South Amboy 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 South Amboy 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 in the high school auditorium. Approximately fifteen parents/community members attended the meeting. In addition, two board of education members, the school superintendent, director of special education, and several child study team members were present. 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.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Area Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Statewide Assessment was determined to be an area 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 policies/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required statements of assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding staff development.

Area(s) of Need:

Staff Development - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews that staff throughout the district are not familiar with special education terminology, special education processes and/or procedures relevant to federal and state requirements.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that in-service training is provided to all staff members regarding the requirements of N.J.A.C. 6A:14. The improvement plan must also include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the staff training.**

Section II: F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and appropriate certification of staff members.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision/oversight of related services due to vacancies, related service goals/objectives, frequency/duration/location, and convening meetings prior to making changes in the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and transfer students.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that extended school year services are not considered for all students at IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year services are discussed and considered for all students at IEP meetings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Transfer Students – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not have transfer procedures in place that result in the immediate review of the IEP and evaluations by the child study team. As a result, services are delayed or students do not receive the programs and services required by the current IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the immediate review of the current IEP and evaluation data by the CST when a student with disabilities enrolls in the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, surrogate parents and convening meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of notices and meetings in native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the content/provision of all district notices.

Area(s) of Need:

Content and Provision of Notices - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the content of the district's notices of meetings do not contain all required statements/components. Additionally, it was determined that though these notices are available, they are not consistently sent to parents and/or adult students prior to meetings.

- **The district will revised the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notices of meetings contain all required statements and components. The plan must further ensure these revised notices are provided to parents/adult students prior to a meeting and that the provision**

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

is documented in students' files. It is recommended that the district adopt the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding child find, and audiometric and vision screening. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding direct referrals from teachers, 20-day timeline for identification meetings and health /medical summaries.

Area(s) of Need:

Direct Referrals from Teachers - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews that the district's referral process does not permit teachers to make direct referrals to the child study team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure staff have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include an in-service component and an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these activities.**

20-Day Timeline - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not convene an identification meeting within the required 20-day timeline.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are convened within 20-days of receipt of the referral. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Health/Medical Summaries - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not review and summarize the student's existing health information when referred to the child study team.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that upon receipt of a referral to the child study team, the school nurse reviews and summarizes available health and medical information regarding the student.**

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 and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the acceptance and rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change. The plan must be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding functional assessments and written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that evaluation reports for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services do not include all of the required components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain the required components identified in NJAC 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that evaluators do not date their written reports. In addition, copies of evaluation reports are not provided to parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are dated and copies of these evaluation reports are provided to parents. The plan must include a mechanism to document the provision of reports to parents. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation planning meetings and reevaluations completed by age five.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding three-year timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Three-year Timeline - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not meet the three-year timeline for reevaluations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are conducted every three years or sooner if conditions warrant. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves in the area of eligibility meetings.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding meeting participants and the provision of reports to parents. These issues are addressed in other sections of the report. The on-site visit further identified an area of need regarding severe discrepancy formula.

Area(s) of Need:

Severe Discrepancy Formula - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district has not adopted a severe discrepancy formula.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district adopts an appropriate severe discrepancy formula. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of implementation dates.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding considerations/required statements, alignment of goals/objectives with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, progress reporting and teacher access/responsibility regarding implementation of the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding annual reviews, 90-day timelines and participants at meetings/individualized decision-making process.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Review Timelines - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not complete annual reviews within required timelines.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all annual reviews are completed within required timelines. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

90-Day Timeline - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not complete initial evaluations within required timelines.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all initial IEPs are implemented within 90-days of receipt of parental consent. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Participants at Meetings/Individualized Decision-Making - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although child study team members, special education teachers, parents and students attend IEP meetings, regular education teachers do not consistently attend these. As a result of the lack of participation by regular education teachers, the IEP team does not have the ability to fully discuss all of the required considerations and statements contained in the IEP. In addition, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although regular education teachers do not consistently attend meetings, their signatures appeared on the on the participant page of IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers consistently attend meetings to ensure a full discussion of all the required considerations and statements contained in the IEP and that only attendees at IEP meetings sign the participants' page. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedure.**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of nonacademic/extracurricular participation.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding considerations and required statements, supplemental aids and services (SAS), and LRE considerations.

Area(s) of Need:

Considerations/Required Statements/SAS - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs do not contain all of the required components and statements.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs contain all of the required statements and components. It is recommended that the district use the IEP form developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

LRE Considerations - During the on-site monitoring it determined through interviews with staff that the IEP team does not consider placement with nondisabled peers as the first placement option for all students with disabilities. It was further identified that because the district does not offer in-class support at the elementary level, this program is never considered or discussed as a possible placement option.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP team discusses regular education with supplemental aids and services as the first placement option for all students. The plan must further ensure placement decisions are based on the individual needs of students and not on the availability of programs at the elementary level. Additionally, the plan must include in-services and an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of the procedures, as well as a mechanism to ensure a full continuum of placement options is available.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the Statement of Transition Service Needs, courses of study, preferences/interests, assessments considered, agency involvement, and student/agency invitation. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding the Statement of Needed Transition Services.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Needed Transition Services - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not complete the Statement of Needed Transition Services in IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the Statement of Needed Transition Services contains all required components. The improvement plan must include staff training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

Transition to Pre-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conferences and transition from early intervention programs to preschool programs for the disabled by age three.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments and Manifestation Determinations. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan must be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding discipline procedures and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

Area(s) of Need:

Discipline Procedures - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews with vice principals and child study team members that the district does not allow students to return to school after completing a suspension unless accompanied by a parent or designee. In the event the student returns to school unaccompanied, the district records the student as absent.

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure current procedures do not result in the de facto continuation of removals from programs without benefit of the provision of services in the event those removals constitute a change in placement. The improvement plan must also include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

Procedural Safeguards for Potentially Disabled Students - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not ensure students who are identified as potentially disabled are afforded the same procedural safeguard rights as disabled students when they are removed from program as a result of a disciplinary action.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students who are identified as potentially disabled are afforded the same procedural safeguards as classified students when they are removed as a result of a disciplinary action. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diplomas and participation.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding written notice of graduation and statewide assessment documentation within graduation requirements.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of Graduation - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide notice of graduation to students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students are provided with notice of graduation and that this provision is documented in their files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the “Notice of Graduation” form developed by the NJDOE, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Rationale for Exemption from Passing SWA - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs do not contain a statement regarding the reason students are exempt from passing the statewide assessment.

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

- **he district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs contain a statement of why students are exempt from passing a statewide assessment.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding class size.

Area(s) of Need:

Class Size - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through classroom visits and a review of class lists that class sizes exceed code limits. The county office has been notified because of the numbers of students and classes currently impacted by this are of noncompliance.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the numbers of students with disabilities enrolled in classes comply with code requirements. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, and maintenance/destruction of student records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding documentation of the location of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Records in Other Locations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other records in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records maintained by the district is identified in the central file.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the South Amboy 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. As a result of this review the district was able to identify some areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revisions, should be sufficient to bring about systemic change with the implementation of an appropriate system of supervision and oversight.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with the child study team. Parents view the child study team as very receptive and willing to meet when parents have made requests. Additionally, parents expressed several positive comments regarding the early intervention/pre-school disabled program in the district. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. These included, provision of written notice, teacher access/responsibility, and transition issues.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, length of day/year, facilities, appropriate certification of staff, consent, surrogate parents, meetings, summer referrals, assessments, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations completed by age five, implementation dates on IEPs, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, pre-school transition planning conferences, transition from early intervention programs to preschool programs by age three, interim alternative educational settings, graduation/IEP requirements, diplomas, participation in graduation, age range/waivers, group size/speech therapy, schedules, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding, provision/oversight of related services due to vacancies, related service goals/objectives, frequency/duration/location, convening meetings prior to making changes in the IEP, provision of notices/meetings in native language, child find activities, audiometric/vision screenings, acceptance/rejection of reports, IEP considerations/required statements, alignment of goals/objectives with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, progress reporting, teacher access/responsibility regarding implementation of the IEP, the statement of transition service needs, courses of study, preferences/interests, agency involvement, student/agency invitation, and various discipline issues.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding staff development, extended school year, transfer students, content/ provision of all district notices, direct referrals from teachers, twenty-day timelines for identification meetings, health/medical summaries, functional assessments, written reports, three year timeline for reevaluations, eligibility criteria/statement, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, participants at meetings/individualized decision-making, LRE required statements, supplemental aids and services, LRE considerations, statement of needed transition services, discipline procedures and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, written notice of graduation, statewide assessment documentation

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

within graduation requirements, class size and documentation of records in other locations.

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.

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