

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

School District: South Hackensack

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: October 28 and 29, 2003

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the South Hackensack 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 Hackensack 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 Hackensack 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 Memorial School on October 21, 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, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their co-teaching and collaborative teaching within their general education classrooms that provides maximum opportunities for inclusion of special education students. Many staff members are dually certified in general and special education and teacher aides are all college graduates or certified. The district

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

provides tuition reimbursements to encourage both teacher aides and certified staff to continue their educational studies.

The district ensures their out-of-district special education students have the opportunity to participate in grade appropriate field trips with their peers.

The district also provides academic and social skills support to younger students by having seventh and eighth grade students serve as speech aides and pupil assistance committee aides. The older students help these younger students reinforce skills during recess.

Data Summary:

The South Hackensack School District reported a classification rate of 14.1% for the 2002-2003 school year, which is at the state average. The data submitted by the district indicated that although the placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average, the district has developed a plan to increase inclusion opportunities for pre-school disabled students and pre-K and Kindergarten students with the renovation and expansion of their facilities. For students ages 6-21 the need to increase the percentage of students with disabilities in general education from between 40-80% of the day to more than 80% was noted. In the 2002-2003 school year, 32% were in a general education setting for more than 80% of the school day; 48% were in the general education setting between 40-80% and 18% were in separate settings.

The district was able to provide preliminary data regarding the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge test results. In mathematics, 50% of the special education students scored advanced proficient, 25% were proficient, and 25% were partially proficient. However, language arts literacy scores were reported as only having 25% proficient with 75% being partially proficient. Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment scores indicated 50% proficiency in language arts literacy; 20% proficiency in mathematics and 40% in science.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

FAPE, Reevaluation, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Programs and Services, Discipline and Transition to Pre-School 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 professional and parent development and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meeting and native language. This district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 Child Find, Referral process, direct referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, signature of agreement or disagreement, documentation of eligibility and criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency involvement and age 14 transition service needs. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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 areas of approved accommodations and modifications, alternate assessment, participation and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Study Team knowledge of assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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 and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction, and documentation of other locations.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff knowledge of the policies and procedures regarding student records. The district's plan is sufficient.

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 South Hackensack School District on October 28 and 29, 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 this review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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.

A review of district data indicated that the district is providing services to a significant number of students in the general education setting for more than 40% of the school day. The district has developed an improvement plan to increase the participation of students in general education as well as increasing the inclusion of pre-school disabled students. The district has included the expansion of programs with the renovation and expansion of the district's facility.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The three parents who attended the meeting indicated that they felt that their input was valued and listened to when designing their child's educational program. They indicated that there was open communication between the staff and themselves.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluation, independent evaluations, three year timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement, IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEP's to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive documentation and decision making process, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access in district, notification and participation of out of district students in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities, and continuum of programs, pre-school transition planning conference, early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, documentation to case manager and suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, participation and approved accommodations and modifications in

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

statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate assessments, class sizes and age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, and consultation time, access and requests for student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, content and provision of notices of meetings, notices in native language, pre-referral interventions, acceptance and rejection of reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meetings, age fourteen transition service needs preferences and interests, child study team knowledge of statewide assessments and staff knowledge of procedures for student records.

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