

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

District: South Plainfield School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: June 10, 2003

Monitoring Team: Barbara Tucker, Stephen Coplin, Michelle Davis, Kim Murray, Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson and Deborah Masarsky

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the South Plainfield 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 Plainfield 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 Plainfield 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 Central Administration Building on June 5, 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, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for **The Homework Club** that has been successfully implemented at several schools and provides students with the opportunity to experience a safe and positive learning environment. This program invites all students to spend time with teachers and guidance counselors after school to receive assistance.

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

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation 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 policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of in-service training needs for professional and paraprofessional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school year/day, transfer students and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of regular, modified or adaptive physical education, provision of programs and related services, and the availability of service providers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities and the provision of speech services. **The county office of education has been advised of the concerns regarding the facilities issue in the district.**

Area(s) of Need:

Provision of Speech Services - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that speech personnel cease the provision of speech services prior to the ending date specified in IEPs. **The district has already implemented corrective action to address compensatory speech/language services for students who were affected by this cessation of services during the 2002-2003 school year.**

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language services are provided in accordance with the duration of time identified in IEPs. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**New Jersey State 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 provision of notice and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of selecting and training surrogate parents, contents of notice of meetings, meetings in the native language of the parent, notices in native language, translation resources and consent for initial evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district also identified concerns in the areas of the provision of written notice to parents/adult students and 20-day timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of eligibility and meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not provide notice of eligibility to parents and/or adult students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents and/or adult students are provided with notice of eligibility. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

Meeting Participants - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that regular education and special education teachers do not consistently attend meetings because the district has difficulty obtaining substitute coverage.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all required participants attend meetings. The plan must include an administrative component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the referral process, pre-referral interventions and health summary.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of vision/hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding child find activities and identification meeting timelines.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Child Find for School-Aged Students - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that although the district conducts child find activities for students three to five, the district's child find procedures do not include outreach activities for students six to twenty-one or migrant and homeless students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child find outreach activities are developed for students ages six through twenty-one including students who are migrant or homeless.**

Identification Meeting Timelines - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that building level administrators do not date referrals from staff and/or parents upon receipt. Instead, referrals are only dated once they are provided to and received in the special services office. As a result, identification meetings are not consistently convened within 20-days of the receipt of these referrals by the district's administrators.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that upon receipt, all referrals are dated by the individual who receives the referral and that identification meetings are conducted within twenty days of that receipt. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary assessments, signed and dated written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the use of materials and procedures to assess students with limited English proficiency. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and in-service training to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the components of a functional assessment and acceptance/rejection of outside evaluation reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Components of a Functional Assessment - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that written reports do not consistently contain all of the required components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports contain the required components of a functional assessment**

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

as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Rationale for Rejection of Outside Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that child study team members do not provide parents with a written rationale when they reject assessments from an outside agency or professional.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child study team members provide parents with a written rationale when they reject an assessment from an outside agency or professional. The 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 meetings, criteria and statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility and the provision of evaluation reports to parents and/or adult students.

Area(s) of Need:

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement with Eligibility - During the on-site monitoring interviews with staff and record review indicated that the district does not ensure that all members of the IEP team certify in writing whether the determinations of eligibility reflect his/her opinion.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all participants at the eligibility meeting certify in writing their agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Evaluation Reports to Parents and/or Adult Students - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that evaluation reports are not provided to parents and adult students at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents and adult students at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher responsibility in implementing IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meetings, IEPs in effect prior to start of related programs, required statements and components in IEPs of students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services, individualized LRE statements and annuals goals and benchmarks. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district also identified concerns in the areas of documentation of IEP meeting participants, provision of IEPs to parents/teachers, documentation of the appropriate decision-making process, documentation of the consideration of supplementary aids and services and Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding age of majority.

Area(s) of Need:

Age of Majority - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with staff and record review that the district does not consistently inform parents and students that all rights will transfer to the student at the age of majority.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents and students are informed three years prior to the student's eighteenth birthday that all rights will transfer when the student reaches that age. It is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of preschool placements because the IEP team does not always consider placement in a general education program or a community-based early childhood program with appropriate supplementary aids and services as the first option. The district also identified a concern regarding the decision-making process since building administrators sometimes place non-classified students in special education classes. Additionally, the district identified a concern in the area of extracurricular activities with non-disabled peers for students in out-of-district placements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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 student and agency invitation and transition components that relate to the students' desired post-school outcomes. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program (EIP) to preschool 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 areas of suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of discipline procedures, notification to the case manager, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return and procedural safeguards/due process. The 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 XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of modifications and accommodations, IEP documentation and alternate proficiency assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student participation in the SRA process, appropriate use of the SRA and staff knowledge regarding contents of the statewide assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of IEP requirements.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of written notice of graduation and notification of graduation activities to parents and/or adult students in out-of-district placements. The 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 XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range waivers and group sizes for speech/language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of collaborative time for staff, descriptions of programs in the district and home instruction. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these procedures.** During the self-assessment process the district also identified a concern regarding placement decisions for school-aged students which are made by building administrators and not based on such factors as individual student needs, category of disability and /or severity of disability and insufficient numbers of resource and/or pull-out classes. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding class sizes for in-class support.

Area(s) of Need:

Class Sizes for In-Class Support- During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review, review of teacher schedules and staff interviews that at the high school level, some in-class support group sizes exceed the required code limits.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the number of students enrolled in in-classes support classes does not exceed the maximum number of students required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.10. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the School District on June 10, 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 areas of need and develop and improvement plan that with some revision will bring about system change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations.

At a focus group meeting held with 6-8 parents prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Among the concerns expressed by parents at the meeting were those relating to class sizes, the need for more assistive technology for students with disabilities and students not being invited to meetings. Some of the other concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school year/day, transfer students, certification, independent evaluations, the referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, multidisciplinary assessments, signed and dated written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standard, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher responsibility in implementing student IEPs, regular education access, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program (EIP) to preschool by age three, suspension tracking, modifications and accommodations, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessments, documentation of IEP requirements, age-range waivers and group sizes for speech/language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-service training needs for professional and paraprofessional staff, the provision of regular, modified or adaptive physical education, provision of programs and related services, availability of service providers, selecting and training surrogate parents, contents of notice of meeting, provision of written notice to parent/adult student, meetings in the native language of the parent, notices in native language, translation resources, consent for initial evaluations, vision/hearing screenings, use of materials and procedures to assess students with limited English proficiency, IEP meetings, IEPs in effect prior to start of related services, documentation of IEP meeting participants, provision of IEPs to parents/teachers, required statements and components in IEPs of students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services, individualized LRE statements, annuals goals and benchmarks, documentation of the decision-making process, documentation of the consideration of supplementary aids and services, Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs), placement in preschool handicapped programs with appropriate supplementary aids and services, extracurricular activities with non-disabled peers for students in out-of-district placement, student/agency invitation, transition components that relate to the students' desired post-school outcomes, discipline procedures, notification to the case manager, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination meetings, alternative educational settings, 45-day return, procedural safeguards/due process, student

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

participation in the SRA process, appropriate use of the SRA to determine proficiency on the HSPA, staff knowledge regarding contents of the statewide assessments, the provision of written notice of graduation, notification of graduation activities to parents and/or adult students in out-of-district placements, placement decisions made by building administrators, collaborative time for staff, pull-out resource programs for preschoolers or school-aged students, descriptions of programs in the district and home instruction.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, speech services, written notice of eligibility, meeting participants, child find activities, identification meeting timelines, components of a functional assessment, rationale for rejection of outside evaluation reports, certification of agreement/disagreement with eligibility, evaluation reports to parents and/or adult students, age of majority, and class sizes for in-class support.

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

Mr. Richard Flamini, Supervisor of Special Services

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

Dr. Robert Rosado, Superintendent

Mr. Pio Pennisi, School Board President