

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

District: South River School District

County: Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: January 15,16, 2002

Monitoring Team: Stephen Coplin, Debbie Masarsky, Georgianna Parlocoski, Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Denise Wilkens

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the South River 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 River 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 River 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 December 5, 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, related services staff and child study team members.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions, Location, Referral and Identification, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services 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 II: FAPE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students and certifications.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding appropriate 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 consent, surrogate parents, provision of district notices, meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding participants at meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it contains an inappropriate procedure that permits guidance counselors to replace regular education teachers at meetings. The procedures must be revised to ensure that all required participants attend code mandated meetings. The improvement plan must further be revised to include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the revised procedures.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding content of district notices and notices in native language.

Areas of Need:

Content of Notices - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that district notices do not contain all the required components and statements.

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

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Notices in Native Languages - During the on-site monitoring it was determined the district does not provide notices in languages other than English, when feasible.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to ensure that notices are provided in languages other than English, when feasible. It is recommended that the district translate notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments, written reports and acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

Areas of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluations - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech evaluations do not include a written statement from the teacher that identifies the educational impact resulting from the speech problem.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech evaluations contain a statement from the classroom teacher regarding the educational impact resulting from the speech problem. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services do not include all 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 the implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that written reports are not dated. In addition, although parents are provided copies of evaluation reports, the district does not document the provision of these reports to parents of students determined eligible for speech/language services.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are dated and that the provision of all evaluation reports are documented in student files. The improvement plan must also include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Acceptance/Rejection - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through file review and interviews that although the IEP team does accept/reject outside reports they do not maintain documentation of that activity.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that it documents the acceptance/rejection of an entire report or assessment, or any part of the report or assessment and provides a rationale for the rejection of the entire or parts of reports and/or assessments. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluations by June 30th for students turning 5 years of age.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding reevaluation timelines. 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 VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility criteria and statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding participants at eligibility conferences. This issue was addressed by the district in Procedural Safeguards.

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

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Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives aligned to the CCCS, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines for speech/language services and teacher access/ responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding 90-day timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding eligibility/IEP meeting discussions, annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services and IEPs to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Eligibility/IEP Meeting Discussions - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that because regular education teachers do not participate in eligibility/IEP meetings, the team cannot fully discuss the required considerations and statements contained in the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers attend eligibility/IEP meetings and fully participate in discussion regarding required considerations and statements contained in the IEP. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Annual Reviews - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that annual reviews of students eligible for special education and related services are not completed within required timelines.

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

IEPs to Parents - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and record review that although parents are provided with copies of IEPs, that provision is inconsistently documented in student files.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the provision of copies of IEPs to parents is documented in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation within the least restrictive environment statement and nonacademic/ extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the continuum of program options. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district will revise the improvement plan to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the individual decision-making process for preschool.

Area of Need:

Individual Decision - Making Process for Pre-School Students - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and file review that all pre-school youngsters are currently placed in self-contained programs and that placement decisions are not based on individual needs but instead, on existing programs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that placement decisions are based on individual student needs and not on program availability. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to ensure disabled preschoolers have the opportunity to receive instructional services in a regular preschool setting with their nondisabled peers when that placement option is determined appropriate. The plan must also include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of transition services.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding transition documentation.

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Area(s) of Need:

Transition Documentation - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews that in the 9th grade, special education teachers administer a preference/interest survey. However, the results of this survey are not consistently documented in the transition section of the IEP. Additionally, child study team members do not consistently complete the transition sections of the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure results from interest and preferences surveys are documented to ensure consideration of these results during transition planning meetings. The plan must also ensure all transition components are completed during the development of the IEP. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of transition to pre-school by age 3.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the preschool transition planning conference.

Area of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not participate in preschool transition planning conferences.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to facilitate the district's participation in the transition planning conference arranged by the Department of Health and Senior Services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary Of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavior assessment and interim alternative educational setting.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding manifestation determination and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

Area(s) of Need:

Manifestation Determination - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and record review that although the district conducts and documents the convening of manifestation determination meetings, the IEP team does not document whether the misconduct was a manifestation of the student's disability.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents whether the misconduct was a manifestation of the student's disability. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Procedural Safeguard Rights - 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 from program as a result of disciplinary action. The improvement plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Area of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations of Student Records - During the on-site monitoring a review of central files indicates the district does not identify the location of other records it maintains.

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- **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.**

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SUMMARY

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the South River School District on January 15, 16, 2002. 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 the district's review during self-assessment, it was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their concerns regarding the lack of related services at the beginning of each school year, IEP documentation of starting and ending dates for related services and compensatory related services when staff members are unavailable. Additionally, though some parents feel their input was considered, some felt their opinions/input are not welcomed at IEP meetings.

Areas identified as compliant with all standards by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Location, Referral, and Identification, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as compliant by the district during the self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit include extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, certifications, consent, surrogate parents, provision of notices, meetings, independent evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, timely reevaluations of preschool students, eligibility criteria/statements, copies of IEPs to parents, IEP considerations/required statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, teacher access to IEPs, least restrictive environment statement, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, documentation to case manager, tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessment and interim alternative educational setting, preschool transition by age 3, provision of post-school transition services, access to student records, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding participants at meetings, reevaluation timelines, 90-day timelines for implementation of IEPs and continuum of programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding content of notices, notices in native languages, multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments, written reports, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, eligibility/IEP meeting discussions, annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services, documentation of provision of IEPs to parents, individual decision-making process for preschool students, documentation of post-secondary transition services, district participation in preschool transition planning conferences, manifestation determinations,

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procedural safeguards of students who are identified as potentially disabled and the documentation of other locations of student files.

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.