

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

District: Spring Lake School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: February 3, 2004

Monitoring Team: Michelle Davis Young, Vanessa Leonard and Barbara Tucker

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Spring Lake School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Spring Lake 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 Spring Lake 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 H.W. Mountz School on December 10, 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 its **Project Harmony** program. This school wide program promotes respect among students and builds a more positive student-to-student environment. A group of students is selected as part of the publicity team to train and empower other students with pro-social skills. This program encourages all students to solve problems through conflict resolution, mediations and uses school-wide activities and celebrations to reinforce the message that "Bullying is not an acceptable behavior."

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The district is also commended for the **Art Masters** program in which third grade students, including students with disabilities, are exposed to works of art from Monet, Picasso, Dali and others. Over the course of the school year, students study the works, style and techniques of these artists. After participating in discussions and interpreting these artists' works, students are encouraged to explore their own artistic talent by creating their own version of each style.

The district is further commended for the **NJ and Milken Unite Seniors, Students and Teachers (NJ MUSST)** program. In this program, all seventh grade students participate in interactive activities with senior citizens from their community by utilizing the common threads of literacy, dialog and reflection. Writing and literacy projects are completed through a series of site-visits as students and seniors exchange ideas, insights, recollections and future aspirations culminating in the development of an annual "keepsake" book.

Finally, the district is commended for the **Community Connections Through Architecture (CCTA)** program, which is designed to integrate the arts through the curriculum with a focus on architecture and the community. All students (K-8) are encouraged to engage in collaborative activities with one another, parents, and school personnel to develop lasting works of art that are reflective of the school/community's rich history and are exhibited throughout the school building and in community based businesses.

Data Summary:

Approximately 55% of the district's special needs students were educated in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day during the 2002-2003 school year. The district exceeded the state average by about 14% in this area. Additionally, the district has included 100% of its 4th and 8th grade students in statewide assessments. Finally, the district is commended for its efforts in obtaining close to a 100% parental participation in IEP meetings.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements 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 for professional and paraprofessional staff and parents. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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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 day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of goals/objectives, frequency, duration and location of counseling services in the IEP. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of administrative knowledge of transfer student procedures and hearing aides. 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 III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, content and provision of notices of meetings and written notice and notices in native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations. 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 IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals from parents/staff, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines/participants.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities and pre-referral interventions. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 evaluation, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments, written reports signed/dated and acceptance/rejection of evaluation reports. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting/participants, criteria and statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of signature of agreement/disagreement with a rationale. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to IEP meetings. 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 VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings/participants, goals and objectives aligned with the Core

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Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, IEPs to parents, statements of Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) and considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for speech/language services and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for special education and related services. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision-making process, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access for in-district students and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities. 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 X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of student/agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of statements of Transition Services Needs and preferences/interests survey/assessment. 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and early intervention program to preschool disabilities program by age three.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager and behavior intervention plans. 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 class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of consultation time. 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 XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of student record procedures. 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.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Spring Lake School District on February 3, 2004. 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 Spring Lake School District is commended for the outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas of need during the self-assessment process and for developing an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of the improvement plan activities to address most of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. 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.

The district is further commended for exceeding the state average by approximately 14% in the area of special needs students being educated in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day. Additionally, the district is praised for ensuring that 100% of its 4th and 8th grade students participate in statewide assessment. Finally, the district is commended for ensuring that nearly 100% of its parents participate in IEP meetings.

A focus group meeting held on December 10, 2003 was attended by approximately 20 parents, teachers, child study team members and administrators. Phone interviews were also conducted on February 3, 2004, with approximately 10 additional parents. Throughout this process, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's special education programs and services. Additionally, parents stated that they feel their children are receiving a high quality education in the Spring Lake School District. The district involves parents in the decision-making process by providing notices of meetings in a timely manner and holding meetings at a mutually convenient time. Moreover, parents praised the district for making certain that there is open and ongoing communication between parents and district personnel. Some parents expressed concerns regarding the provision of transition planning and services as the students are sent to a high school in a neighboring school district. Finally, parents reported that they are provided with IEPs and the preschool students have programs in place by age three.

Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements were areas determined to be compliant with all of the standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included of policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings and written notice, notices in native language, referral process, direct referrals from parents/staff, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines/participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, eligibility meeting/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, IEP meetings/participants, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, IEPs to parents, statements of Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) and considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for speech/language services, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, Least Restrictive

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Environment (LRE) documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access for in-district students, continuum of programs, student/agency invitation, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention program to preschool disabilities program by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, access/requests, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of records and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-services training for professional and paraprofessional staff, parent training, documentation of goals/objectives, frequency, duration and location of counseling services in the IEP, administrative knowledge of transfer student procedures, hearing aides, surrogate parents, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find activities, pre-referral interventions, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated, acceptance/rejection of evaluation reports, signature of agreement/disagreement with a rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to IEP meetings, considerations/required statements in IEPs for student's eligible for special education and related services, notification and participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities, statements of Transition Services Needs, preferences/interests survey/assessment, documentation to case manager, behavior intervention plans, consultation time and staff knowledge of student record procedures.

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