

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Spring Lake Heights

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: November 15, 2005

Monitoring Team: J. Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Spring Lake Heights 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 Heights School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Heights 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, speech therapist, and superintendent. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 60.7% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is significantly higher than the state average of 41.9% for that year. Additionally, only 3.6% of students with disabilities attended school in private or public schools outside of the district compared to the state average of 10.1%. The district has placed nearly all 3 and 4-year-old pre-school students with disabilities in settings with nondisabled peers such as community preschool programs. The district's overall classification rate, 14.0%, is consistent with the state average of 14.7%.

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Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

General Provisions, Free and Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition to Preschool, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements and Programs and Services.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the remaining sections reviewed, were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions ▪ Direct referrals ▪ Identification meeting timelines ▪ Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-disciplinary evaluations ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Functional assessments (ESERS) ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation ▪ Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30 ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs) ▪ 90-day timelines
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of LRE decisions ▪ Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs ▪ Continuum of programs ▪ Placement decisions based on students' individual needs
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identification of post-secondary liaison ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to the student's desired outcomes

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suspension tracking system ▪ Discipline procedures employed equitably for all students ▪ IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days ▪ Procedures for determination of change in placement ▪ Procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan ▪ Short-term removals resulting in a change in placement ▪ Short-term removals that are not a change in placement-school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided ▪ Interim Alternative Educational Settings

Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The district must revise the improvement plan for any area where there is an ‘X’ in the ‘Needs Revision’ column.

Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find Ages 3-21- The district must expand their child find contacts. ▪ Summer Referrals - The district must develop a better mechanism for referrals by district staff. 			X X
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Functional Assessments and Educational Impact Statement (ESLS) - The teacher’s evaluation of the educational impact is not consistently included in reports. 			X
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP Considerations and Components - The district has all required components; however, they are not all appropriately reflected in the IEP. 			X
LRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nonacademic and Extracurricular Participation - Students with disabilities educated within the district and outside of the district do not take advantage of district activities. 	X		

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Section	Area	Plan Is Sufficient	Plan Needs Revision	Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age 14 Statement of Transition Service Needs - District staff members stated that although students are invited to, and regularly attend, IEP meetings, transition services are not thorough and need more planning. ▪ Beginning at age 16, IEP Statement of "Needed Transition Services" - The district stated that although students are invited to, and regularly attend, IEP meetings, transition services are not thorough and more planning is needed. 	X		
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of removal forwarded to case manager - The case managers are not always notified in writing when students are suspended. ▪ Manifestation Determinations (MD)- Due to the lack of notification to the case manager, the district is not able to conduct MD meetings at the appropriate times. 	X		X

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Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Activity
Location, Referral, and Identification (LRI)	Vision and Hearing Screenings/Health Summary- Although the district does conduct vision and hearing screenings, they are not completed prior to the initial identification meeting. A health summary must be completed for every student as well.	The district is directed to revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that vision and hearing screenings and a health summary are consistently completed for every student referred to the Child Study Team prior to the initial identification meeting. In addition, the results must be forwarded to the team prior to the meeting. These activities must include procedures, in-service training and oversight to ensure that decisions for students are made utilizing health information.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Spring Lake Heights School District on November 15, 2005. 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further acknowledged for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the OSEP as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 60.7% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate is significantly higher than the state average of 41.9% for that year. Additionally, only 3.6% of students with disabilities attended school in private or public schools outside of the district compared to the state average of 10.1%. The district has placed nearly all 3 and 4-year-old pre-school students with disabilities in settings with nondisabled peers such as community preschool programs. The district's overall classification rate, 14.0%, is consistent with the state average of 14.7%.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. However, one parent expressed concern over the length of time it takes for a referral to get from the referral committee to the Child Study Team. This issue is addressed through the district's improvement plan.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition to Preschool, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments (ESERS), bilingual evaluations, written reports prepared by evaluators, IEP meeting participants, implementation dates, IEPs provided to parents prior to implementation, meetings held annually, or more often, to review and/or revise the IEP, annual reviews completed by June 30, teachers informed of their responsibilities, 90-day timelines, documentation of LRE decisions, opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs, continuum of programs, placement decisions based on students' individual needs, identification of post-secondary liaison, student and agency invitation to IEP meetings, activities, annual goals and benchmarks relative to the student's desired outcomes, suspension tracking system, discipline procedures employed equitably for all students, IEP team meeting for first removal beyond 10 days, procedures for determining change in placement, procedures for conducting functional behavioral assessment and development of behavior intervention plan, short-term removals resulting in a change in placement, short-term removals that are not a change in

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placement (school personnel determining the extent of services to be provided) and interim alternative educational settings.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE are child find ages 3-21, referral process, functional assessment and educational impact statement for students evaluated for speech and language services (ESLS), IEP required considerations and components, and notification of removal forwarded to case manager.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding notification of and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district, age 14 statement of transition service needs, age 16 statement of needed transition services, and manifestation determinations.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding vision and hearing screenings and health summary.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Spring Lake Heights School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the OSEP to address those areas that require revisions.