

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Springfield School District **County:** Union

Monitoring Dates: January 28, 2005 and May 10, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Springfield School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Springfield 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 Springfield 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 **Thelma L. Sandmeier Elementary School**, on **February 3, 2005**. 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

Data Summary:

The district reported a classification rate, including speech-only students, of 15.27% for 2004, which is slightly below the state average of 16.58%. The district currently places 44.2% of special education students in general education for more than 80% of the day. This is an increase of nearly 10% since 2002. In 2002 the district had no preschool disabled students placed in integrated settings. In contrast, in 2004, the district placed

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33.3% of students in an integrated setting, which was significantly higher than the state average for that year of 11%.

District Strengths:

The Springfield Township School District offers many activities to help support the academic progress of students in special and general education programs. The Friends Across Springfield program is a cross-grade and cross-curriculum program for special education students in preschool through middle school. Each month the middle school students select a book to read to the kindergarten and preschool classes. The middle school students then work with the younger students on projects and activities that support the reading selection.

In addition, the district offers three eight-week after school tutoring sessions during the school year to help students reinforce, maintain or advance their skills in reading, writing, mathematics and language arts. The program utilizes software programs to help students progress at their own pace. An individualized program of instruction is designed for each student based on assessment conducted at the beginning of the school year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Free Appropriate Public Education, Location, Referral and Identification, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition to Preschool, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services 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 III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of consent, content and provision of notice of a meeting and content and provision of written notice, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notices in native language. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments, signed and dated written reports, acceptance and rejection of outside reports and bilingual evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations for students referred for speech language services and use of the severe discrepancy formula. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas 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 identified compliance in the areas of considerations and required statements, statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core content curriculum standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participants at IEP meetings for shared time vocational students. The districts 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 identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process and continuum of program options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment, consideration of supplementary aids and services, access to general education programs in the district for students in the program for preschool students with disabilities and notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas 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 identified compliance in the areas of age 14 statement of transition service needs, age 16 statement of needed transition services, student invitation to meetings and preference and interest surveys.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of agency invitations to IEP meetings.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified compliance in the areas of functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of suspension to case manager and suspension tracking. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas 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 Springfield Township School District on January 28, 2005 and May 10, 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 commended for a thorough review conducted as part of the self-assessment process and an improvement plan that address all identified areas of need.

Five parents attended the focus group meeting held on February 3, 2005. Parental opinions varied regarding the overall quality of the special education and related services provided by the district. While the parents at the meeting agreed that the district provided quality programs to students with more severe disabilities, they felt that the district had difficulty providing the special education and related services to students with mild disabilities. A number of the parents indicated that the communication with child study team members was good and that their input was considered at IEP meetings. However, other parents expressed concern that child study team members listened to their input but did not consider it when making decisions about their children's programs. In addition, a few parents indicated that they felt the administration did not support special education and was not interested in improving the existing program.

General Provisions, Free Appropriate Public Education, Location, Referral and Identification, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition to Preschool, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas demonstrating compliance with all standards by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included consent, content and provision of notice of a meeting, content and provision of written notice, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, signed and dated written reports, acceptance and rejection of outside reports, bilingual evaluations, considerations and required statements, statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core content curriculum standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, continuum of program options, age 14 statement of transition service needs, age 16 statement of needed transition services, student invitation to meetings, preference and interest surveys, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding notices in native language, multidisciplinary evaluations for student referred for speech language services, use of the severe discrepancy formula, participants at IEP meetings for shared time vocational students, document of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment, consideration of supplementary aids and services, access to regular education programs in the district for students in the PSD program, notification, and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, agency invitations to IEP meetings, documentation of suspension to case manager and suspension tracking.

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No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit. The original improvement plan submitted by the district in June 2004 will be reviewed for final approval. Verification of implementation will be conducted by the County Office of Education.