

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

District: Stillwater Township School

County: Sussex

Monitoring Dates: September 28, 2004

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills, Jenifer Spear

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Stillwater Township School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Stillwater Township 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. As the first step in the verification process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the **Stillwater Township School District** on September 20, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) completed a comprehensive desk audit, including review of the policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service providers, and other relevant information, and conducted parent interviews by telephone. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and verified that there were no areas of systemic noncompliance.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its various approaches to enhance academic learning. The district offers an after school program taught by regular and special education teachers that provides a review of basic skills taught that day. Similarly, additional academic help is offered through Reading Buddies. This program provides one-to-one reading help in conjunction with the Sussex County Community College. Students working under the supervision of their professor provide this additional help to students with disabilities and nondisabled students.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District staff members have been trained in several special reading programs such as Wilson Reading and Project Read. Tutoring is provided by both general education and special education teachers during the school day. A summer library program is available to all students to encourage reading as a leisure activity as well as to strengthen skills in a more relaxed setting.

The district is also commended for their counseling programs. The district's Lunch Counseling Program deals with social, communication, decision making skills and conflict resolution. In addition to providing individualized and group counseling services, the counselor is present in the lunch room on a regular basis to observe and facilitate social interaction. The Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization provides one-to-one mentoring to students identified as socially, academically or behaviorally at risk under the direction of the school counselor.

The district is further commended for the excellent use of technology. All classrooms have computers and there is a well equipped computer lab. Teachers all maintain their own websites. The school has fully utilized six smart boards in curriculum delivery and is adding an additional six for next year. Additionally, a Kurzweil Reader is ordered for next year and training has already begun to ensure staff will be able to utilize the new technology immediately.

The district takes great pride in its establishment of a general education preschool that encourages integration of preschool students who are disabled into the least restrictive environment in their home school.

Data Summary

The district is to be commended for an outstanding record of inclusive placement of special education students. All students ages three to five are educated in a district integrated general education preschool or a combination of the integrated and the preschool disabled classroom. The data show that 47.1% of these students are in the general education setting and 52.9% are in the combined placement. These numbers are higher than the state percentages of 24.7% and 7.6%. All students in this age group in the district are educated in the least restrictive environment in their home school. Similarly, in the six to twenty-one year age category, 85.4% (in 2003) and 98.1% (in 2004) of special education students are in general education settings more than 80% of the school day. This is nearly double the average for the state and demonstrates the district's commitment to inclusive education.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, FAPE, Procedural Safeguards, Location, Referral and Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Individual Education Plan, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records were determined to be areas of systemic compliance by the

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

district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Stillwater School District on September 28, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment. 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 determine that there were no areas of systemic noncompliance. The district is commended for the areas determined by the school and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated the district has maintained a classification rate several points below the state average for the last three reported years. The establishment of a successful integrated general education preschool has allowed the three to five-year-old preschool students who are disabled to remain in their home school with their non-disabled peers for their special education services. Furthermore, the appropriate consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment is reflected in the district's placement of the vast majority of students ages 6 to 21 in general education classrooms from more than 80% of the day.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, a parent expressed his satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of his child. The one parent who attended the focus meeting is working with the school to organize a parent group to provide information and support for parents of special needs students.

During telephone interviews, parents selected at random, indicated their satisfaction with many of the district's programs. Several parents did express concern with the classroom teachers' consistent implementation and knowledge of the IEP.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notices, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, accept or rejection of reports, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, agreement or

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

disagreement and rationale, provision of a copy of evaluations to the parents ten days prior to the meeting, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core content curriculum standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, provision of IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, student and agency invitations, preschool transition planning conference, placement in program by age three, procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior analysis, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, choice of diploma, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, consultation time, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of locations.

The focus group meeting, additional parent interviews and the comprehensive desk audit found no areas of systemic noncompliance within the various standards.