

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

District: Sussex Wantage Regional **County:** Sussex

Monitoring Dates: April 21 and 22, 2004

Monitoring Team: Susan Wilson, Zola Mills, Jenifer Spear and Carol Raff

Background Information:

During the 2002 - 2003 school year, Sussex Wantage Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Sussex Wantage Regional 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 Sussex Wantage Regional 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 West Ridge Elementary School on April 1, 2004. 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

Sussex Wantage Regional School District has an extensive system of staff development which includes in-house resources, professional consultants and collegial planning to assist their teachers in the acquisition of skills regarding the implementation of new and innovative strategies and programs. Special education teachers are included in these

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

staff development activities in all curricular areas and meet regularly with their regular education peers to share their knowledge and expertise regarding strategies to instruct disabled students.

The district has committed itself to a broad-based inclusive education initiative. This commitment is confirmed by the large percentage of students with disabilities being educated in general education settings and the rising test scores. Interviews with staff throughout the district further reinforced the systemic commitment to, and acceptance of, inclusive practices.

The district is commended for the development of “The Universal Playground” at Clifton E. Lawrence Elementary School, funded with grants from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, United Way and various community partnerships. Children ranging from three to seven are in an academic and social environment that naturally fosters the acceptance of differences and diversity. The Universal Playground provides specifically designed and guided group activity stations that allow disabled and non-disabled students to interact through shared experiences. These experiences are then incorporated into curriculum-based activities. The curriculum-based activities serve to teach an implicit value and afford these students the opportunity to appreciate differences among students.

The district is further commended for its efforts in increasing opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers for students in self-contained classes by providing opportunities to interact with general education students through a variety of activities.

The district is further commended for such programs as Adventure in the Classroom, Full Value Classroom, Wilson Reading and the “Family Helper” newsletter mailed home to all special education families.

Data Summary:

The district is commended for its successful efforts in placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Based on a review of district data, it was identified that 46% of special education students are educated with their non-disabled peers more than 80% of the school day. Additionally, data indicate that only 1% of the district’s classified students are placed in out-of-district settings. The director reports that as a result of the support by other district administrators, teachers, board members and members of the community, he has been able to ensure all special needs students have the opportunity to interact with their nondisabled peers in a variety of activities, not just academics.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Location, Referral, & Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition to Preschool, Graduation Requirements, Programs & 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.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of transfer students and hearing aid procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 four areas of consent, content/provision of written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and content and provision of notices of meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 meeting participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of IEPs to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation of supplementary aids and services, continuum and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular notification and participation of students placed in out-of-district settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 areas of age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services and student and agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preferences and interests. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XI: Discipline

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to the case manager, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative education settings and forty-five day return.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of suspension tracking and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation and alternative assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff knowledge. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Sussex Wantage Regional School District on April 21 and 22, 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 Sussex Wantage Regional School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic changes in most areas. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as well as the dedication of the administrators, staff members, board members and members of the community to support the successful inclusion of special needs students.

A review of district data indicated the district is providing services to a significant number of students ages 6-21 in the regular education setting for more than 80% of the school day.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with all of the district's programs and services and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. A concern was expressed by a parent regarding a delay in having her child classified for special education services. This area was not determined to be an area of need by the district or by the monitors.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, professional/parent development, dissemination of IDEA, extended school year, related services, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, four areas of consent, written notices of meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, accept/rejection of reports, three year timelines, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents or adult students ten days prior to meeting, meeting participants, consideration/required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, Oberti questions, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, continuum of service, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention program to preschool by age three, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, student/agency invite, documentation to case manager, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, choice of diploma, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time,

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

access requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer students, hearing aid procedures, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, IEP to parents, extracurricular activities with nondisabled peers for students in out-of-district placement, courses and preferences, participation in transition conferences and transition from early intervention, suspension tracking, procedural safeguards and staff knowledge of statewide assessments.