

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

District: Sussex County Vocational School District **County:** Sussex

Monitoring Dates: May 20, 21 and 22, 2002

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Sussex County Vocational School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the 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 County Vocational School District developed an improvement plan to address their 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 monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members within the district, on May 13, 2002. 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 Sussex County Vocational School District is commended for taking the initiative to include all students in their "Leadership Program," which allows students to set goals and objectives for the acquisition of social and curricular skills.

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The district also utilizes an Instructional Support Team that assesses all students three times a year to ensure that each student is achieving and making progress within their academic and vocational programs.

The district participates in Project P.R.I.D.E (Promoting Responsibility in Drug Education), an initiative of the New Jersey Department of Corrections that brings supervised, minimum custody offenders into high schools to talk about their personal experiences with drugs and alcohol.

The district also participates in the Y.E.S. (Youth Empowerment Strategies) program that is committed to helping groups create a community climate where respect and trust can grow.

Further, the district provides students with a School Based Mental Health Services Center where they receive counseling and participate in recreational activities.

Numerous students within the Sussex County Vocational School District have been recognized and awarded with gold medals in electronics, graphic arts and engineering.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation, Eligibility, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site.

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 professional/parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. Additionally, during the interview process the district indicated that additional paraprofessionals will be employed and trained to support special education students in general education classes. The district needs to revise its plan to ensure that new staff are included in all in-service training and a mechanism is in place to determine the effectiveness of that training.

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 length of school year/day, facilities and certification.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, transfer students, related services, educational program goals and objectives, and adaptive physical education. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notices of meetings, meetings, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit it was determined the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding consent to implement an IEP prior to the fifteen days and the provision of written notice.

Areas of Need:

Consent to Implement the IEP – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that although parents participated in IEP meetings and reevaluation meetings they did not sign consent to the immediate implementation of the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents provide written consent to the immediate implementation of the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Written Notice – During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that parents/adult students do not consistently receive written notice within 15-days of a meeting. Although a completed written notice is included within the IEP, the IEP is not provided at the meeting and is not consistently mailed within fifteen days of the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided within 15-days of a meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, health summaries, summer referrals, vision/hearing screenings and identification meeting participants and timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of referral process/pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the referral process. The improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of pre-referral interventions because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring 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 multidisciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessment for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language 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 monitoring visit.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations/required statements, age of majority, annual review timelines/ninety-day timelines, and teacher access to and knowledge of the IEP document.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards and assistive technology. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 general education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum of options.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the individualized decision-making process.

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Area of Need:

Individualized Decision Making – During the on-site, a review of IEPs indicated that although the district typically considers and provides placements in the least restrictive environment, those considerations are not documented in the IEP when a student is removed from the general education setting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP includes the factors and discussions that lead to the removal from general education settings. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Written notice of graduation – During the on-site, a review of records indicated written notice of graduation is not being provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides written notice of graduation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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, and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of collaborative time for special and general education teachers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Sussex County Vocational School District on May 20, 21 and 22, 2002. 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 its exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address some 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, only one parent attended although all parents were invited via mail to participate. The parent expressed satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. However, she also expressed concerns regarding college preparation and foreign language requirements, summer reading selections and expectations for special education students.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school year/day, facilities, certifications, notices of meetings, holding of meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, direct referrals (parent/staff), health summary, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, participants and timelines for identification meeting, multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, functional assessments for students eligible for special education services, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, age of majority, annual review, ninety-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, general education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum of options, agency invitation, agency involvement in transition, age-fourteen and age-sixteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation IEP requirements, diploma, participation, programs and services, class-size/waivers, age-range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent/adult-student access, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, extended school year, transfer students, surrogate parents, referral processes/pre-referral interventions, functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, goals and objective aligned with core curriculum content standards, assistive technology, and collaborative time for special and general education teachers.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding consent for IEP implementation, written notice, documentation of the individualized decision-making process, student invitations, and written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of this monitoring report, the Sussex County Vocational School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions.