

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

District: Swedesboro-Woolwich School District

County: Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: October 21, 22, and 23, 2002

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Julia Harmelin

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Swedesboro-Woolwich School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Swedesboro-Woolwich 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 Swedesboro-Woolwich 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 Clifford School on October 17, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district provides an extensive parent volunteer program. Instituted four years ago, the program has expanded from provision of clerical support to provision of instructional support. The district provides training and orientation to these volunteers and school personnel have reported that these volunteers are a valuable asset to school programs.

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The district also provides a student leader program for students in the 5th and 6th grades. Students are chosen based on established criteria and staff recommendations. This program develops and enhances leadership qualities in the students selected for participation. These student leaders deliver morning announcements over the school's public address system, help organize various community projects, and assist in character education activities.

The district also provides a peer leadership adventure program entitled Camp Paradise. Students attend this one-day camp program which is designed to foster group collaboration and team-building skills.

The district also operates a parent resource library which makes videotapes, books, and other materials available for parent use. In addition, the district provides parent training workshops on a variety of topics.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Individualized Education Program (IEP), Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Programs and Services 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 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 concerns in the areas of staff development. Although the district's improvement plan did not specifically identify a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts for instructional staff, on-site monitoring indicated that the district has a successful mechanism in place. Therefore, the district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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 of related services, transfer procedures, adaptive PE, length of school day/year, and oversight of IEP implementation.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding certification, facilities, extended school year, and goals and objectives for OT. The county office is aware of the certification issue and is working with the district to resolve the situation. In addition, the district is experiencing overcrowding due to rapidly increasing enrollment. As a result,

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space is a problem for both special education and regular education programs. During on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district has an extensive building project in place and it is anticipated that these space issues will be resolved by September 2003.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the need for extended school year is not consistently discussed at meetings and provided when appropriate.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the need for extended school year is considered for all students and provided when appropriate. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Goals and Objectives for OT – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that IEPs do not consistently contain goals and objectives for occupational therapy.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district develops goals and objectives for occupational therapy. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notice of a meeting, written notice of evaluation, eligibility, and IEP, notice timelines, meetings, provision of translators, and independent evaluations.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice in native language, written notice of reevaluation, provision of due process hearing rules, and meeting participants at the preschool level.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice in Native Language – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that notice is not provided in native language when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided in the parents' native language, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Written Notice of Reevaluation – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that written notice of reevaluation does not include the following components: an explanation of why the district is taking the proposed action and a description of options considered or rejected and why they were rejected.

- **The district will revise its notice of reevaluation to include all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Due Process Hearing Rules – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews that the due process hearing rules are not provided to parents when required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the due process hearing rules are provided to parents when required. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Meeting Participants for Preschool – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and record review that a regular education teacher is not consistently in attendance at meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a regular education teacher is in attendance at preschool meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant 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, referral process, direct referrals, and summer referrals.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Health Summary/Vision and Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that health summaries and vision and hearing screening information is not provided at the time of the identification meeting. Instead, the information is obtained as part of the evaluation process and is considered at the time of eligibility determination.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that health summaries and vision and hearing screening information are provided to the child study team at the time of the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative**

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oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.

Identification Meeting Timelines – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that identification meetings are not consistently conducted within 20 days of receipt of a referral. School personnel identify increased enrollment and higher caseloads as barriers to compliance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are held within required timelines. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of use of standardized assessments, components of functional assessments, components of written reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding dating of evaluation reports and multi-disciplinary assessments for preschool.

Area(s) of Need:

Dating of Evaluation Reports – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that child study team members are not dating evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that team members date evaluation reports. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Multi-disciplinary Assessments for Preschool – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that evaluations for preschoolers do not include a minimum of two child study team evaluations. The district currently considers the speech evaluation as one of the two minimum required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a minimum of two child study team evaluations are conducted for preschool students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and participants and reevaluations for students turning age five.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation timelines and planning meetings for speech only students.

Area(s) of Need:

Reevaluation Timelines – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that students are not consistently reevaluated within three years of the previous determination of eligibility. School personnel report that increased enrollment and high caseloads are barriers to compliance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are completed with three years of the date of previous eligibility. The plan must include an oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Planning Meetings – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that reevaluation planning meetings are not consistently conducted for speech only students when considering a change in eligibility. Students are declassified from speech at the annual review without benefit of a reevaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluation planning meetings are conducted whenever a change in eligibility is considered for speech only students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, eligibility criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the signatures of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

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Area(s) of Need:

Signatures of Agreement/Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the district does not document the agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations by all participants at the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations by participants at the eligibility meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, continuum of services, Oberti considerations, provision of supplemental aids and services, and access to regular education programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students placed out-of-district. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding a program for students with behavior needs.

Area(s) of Need:

Students with Behavior Needs – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel indicate that there is a need for an in-district program to address students with behavior concerns. Other staff members indicated that currently some of the students placed in the multiple disabilities program are not having their have behavior needs met because of the lack of an appropriate program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a needs assessment is conducted to determine the need for a behavior disabilities program. The plan must include a mechanism for providing this program should the need be identified. In addition the plan must include in-service activities and a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of the training.**

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation in the sixth grade awards night ceremony. The district currently holds an awards night for students transitioning to the receiving high school district. Although out-of-district students are not invited to this activity, the district has incorporated this event in the improvement plan activities developed to address participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent access to records, access sheets, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Location of Other Records – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Swedesboro-Woolwich School District on October 21, 22, and 23, 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 the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas 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, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents were pleased with the level of child study team support and the opportunities for in-class support and other supplemental aids and services provided in the regular education program. Parents report that they are encouraged to be active participants in the IEP planning process and the district accommodates their needs regarding the scheduling of meetings. A concern was expressed regarding CST caseload given the dramatically increasing student enrollment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer procedures, facilities, certification, consent, written notice timelines, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral procedures, evaluations, reevaluations, eligibility determination, IEP development, IEP documentation, IEP revisions, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews, individualized decision-making, access to regular education, continuum of services, transition, discipline, statewide assessment, provision of programs and services, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, surrogate parents, provision of evaluation reports to parents, and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students placed out-of-district.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, goals and objectives for OT, native language, written notice of reevaluation, provision of the due process hearing rules, meeting participants at the preschool level, timelines for identification meetings, initial evaluations, and reevaluations, evaluation reports, multi-disciplinary assessments for preschoolers, reevaluation planning meetings for speech only students, signatures of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determination, programs for students with behavior issues, and documentation of other locations of pupil records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Swedesboro-Woolwich School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.