

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Tabernacle School District

County: Burlington

Monitoring Dates: March 4, 5, 6, 2002

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Julia Harmelin, Deborah Knauss

Background Information

During the 2000 - 2001 school year, the Tabernacle School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Tabernacle 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 Tabernacle School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Tabernacle Middle School on February 26, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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 district has implemented the Fast ForWord reading program for students with weaknesses in phonemic awareness. The district should be commended for the

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

commitment of both time and resources in the training and implementation of this highly individualized program.

The district has implemented a music therapy program as a related service. This program combines whole language and phonemic awareness through singing.

The district provides a supplementary tutoring program for all students. The tutoring program is an after-school service for elementary school students and is an eighth-period option for middle school students.

The district offers an after school American Sign-Language club for all students. This club is designed to teach students sign language to assist them in communicating with their auditorily impaired peers.

The district is heavily involved in Special Olympics where many of the students either participate or observe. One staff member has obtained her Commercial Driver's License (CDL), and picks the students up on a small bus to afford them the opportunity to attend the Olympics.

The district should be commended for its continued commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities and for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs. This is evidenced by the fact that only two students are placed in out-of-district programs.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Graduation, 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.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures and professional and parent development. The district's improvement plan regarding staff development is sufficient. The district's improvement plan regarding parent development and policies and procedures is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

II. Free and Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of extended school year, related services (Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Music Therapy, Counseling, Transportation), and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings, and native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of notices of meetings, independent evaluations, and meeting participants (regular education teacher) for identification meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district had implemented activities that corrected the identified issues prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of written notice of proposed evaluations, provision of due process hearing rules, and meeting participants for preschool.

Areas of Need:

Written Notice of Proposed Evaluation – During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records and interviews with district personnel indicate that although notice of a proposed evaluation is provided to parents at the time of the evaluation planning meeting, there is no documentation that N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A has been provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents the provision of N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6 when that provision is required. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Due Process Hearing Rules – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with district personnel indicate that although written notice indicates the due process hearing rules are included with the notice, the document is not actually included.

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

Meeting Participants for Preschool – During the on-site monitoring, a review of meeting documentation and interviews with district personnel indicates that regular education teachers are not in attendance at any preschool meeting. These include identification meetings, eligibility meetings and IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure regular education teachers are in attendance at preschool meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

IV. Location, Referral, and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding child find 3-21, direct referrals (parents and staff), and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the referral process and meeting timelines. During the on-site, it was determined that the district has implemented actions that corrected the identified issues prior to the on-site monitoring visit. The district's improvement plan regarding identification meeting timelines is sufficient to bring about the required changes.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site regarding health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

Areas of Need:

Health Summary - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that health summaries are not completed prior to the identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a health summary is provided to the child study team prior to the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Vision and Hearing Screenings - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that vision and hearing screenings are not completed for students prior to the identification meeting.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that vision and hearing screenings are completed prior to the identification meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, speech and language reports, and acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments and components of written reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding signed and dated reports.

Areas of Need:

Signed and Dated Reports - During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicated that child study team members do not date evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure evaluation reports are dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, notices, participants at planning meetings other than at preschool level, parental consent, and reevaluations for students turning age five.

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

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

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

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of evaluation reports to parents. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the CCCS, age of majority, implementation dates, and teacher knowledge and access.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding annual review timelines and 90-day timelines. During the on-site visit, it was verified that the district has corrected the issue of annual review timelines. The improvement plan is sufficient to address the issue regarding 90-day timelines. In addition, the district identified concerns regarding IEP documentation. Although the district has adopted a new IEP format, they have identified a need to oversee the completion of these documents in a more effective manner. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, and continuum of services. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district had implemented activities to correct the identified issues prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

X. Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, and age 16 needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding student and agency invitation, agency involvement, and documentation of preferences and interests. During the on-site, it was determined that the district had implemented activities that corrected the identified issues prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding documentation to case managers. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding alternate assessments.

During the on-site, it was determined the district had implemented activities to correct the identified issue prior to the on-site monitoring visit.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Tabernacle School District on March 4, 5, 6, 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 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 also 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. The district is further commended for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs for students with disabilities.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Some parents indicated concerns regarding the provision of services, continuum issues, and training for aides. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings, native language, child find 3-21, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings, eligibility meetings, criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP components, implementation dates, teacher knowledge and access, considerations and documentation and supplemental aids and services in relation to least restrictive environment, regular education access, the preschool transition process, age 14 transition service needs, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavior assessments, manifestation determinations, and interim alternate education settings, statewide assessment participation, accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation, graduation requirements, programs and services, and student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional development, extended school year, related services, notices of meetings, functional assessments, written reports, reevaluation timelines, individualized decision-making, and continuum.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding meeting participants, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and written reports.

Areas of non-compliance that were corrected prior to the on-site visit include notices of meetings, independent evaluations, the referral process, copies of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility timelines, annual review timelines, Oberti, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, student and agency invitation, agency involvement,

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

documentation of preferences and interests of students ages 14, documentation of discipline removals to case managers, and alternate assessments.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the 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 to the improvement plan.