

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

District: Tenafly

Monitoring Dates: October 2 – 4, 2000

Monitoring Team: Stephanie DeBruyne, Karen Ellmore, Joshua Gillenson

Background Information

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Tenafly School District conducted a self-assessment to determine if the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

In December 1999, the parents and staff were invited to attend a focus group public meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Based on the information collected by the district, a self-assessment document was developed citing strengths and areas of need. The district is in the process of developing activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas identified by the district as areas of need.

A second focus group public meeting was held in the district on September 28, 2000 prior to the monitoring visit. This focus group, which included parents and district representatives, was facilitated by the Monitoring Team from the New Jersey State Department of Education. At this meeting, parents reported some concerns, but indicated they were very pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services.

District Strengths

The district holds monthly evening meetings with the Special Education Parents Liaison Group to discuss issues and concerns in special education.

The district has increased in-class resource programs throughout the district. Through the provision of this program, students have been able to successfully remain in general education. During the 2000-01 school year, only three self-contained classes are operating; two are half-day preschool disabled classes, and the third is a primary level language-learning disabled class.

A regularly published district newsletter focuses on students, district staff, meetings and in-service training for personnel and parents. Special education is highlighted throughout the newsletter. Any student throughout the district who has received an award is congratulated. This includes students with educational disabilities.

Self-Assessment Findings

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need within the sections of General Provisions, Free and Appropriate Public Education, Procedural Safeguards, Eligibility, Individualized Education Programs, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Discipline, and Statewide Assessment. The district is developing an improvement plan to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified within the self-assessment and during the on-site monitoring visit. The following findings are the results of the on-site monitoring and will be addressed in the district's revised improvement plan.

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

The district has developed procedures to locate, refer, and identify students ages 3 to 21. The district provides interventions in general education programs to alleviate the student's educational deficits. Referrals generated over the summer are addressed within the mandated timelines. Identification meetings are conducted appropriately. These areas were accurately assessed by the district during the self-assessment process.

During the self-assessment process the district identified that timelines and vision and hearing screenings were areas of need that required improvement. However, an additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding a delay in forwarding a written referral to the child study team.

Area of Need:

Delay of forwarding written referral to the child study team – Information obtained through the interview process indicated that referrals made to the child study team come through a variety of sources including direct referrals from teachers and parents and referrals generated through the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). Child Study Team members participate in PAC meetings and when a decision is made to refer a student from PAC to the child study team, the team member immediately arranges for an identification meeting with the appropriate individuals. However, though all

procedures regarding the identification meeting are implemented appropriately and in a timely manner, the referral from PAC is typically date stamped as a number of days after the identification meeting has been held.

- **It is recommended that the district revise its procedures regarding the forwarding of written referrals from PAC to the child study team by having the team member date stamp the referral and forward a copy of the dated referral to the central office.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that evaluation procedures are technically sound, are neither culturally nor racially discriminatory, and are administered by trained personnel. The district also ensures that students with disabilities receive a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a multidisciplinary team of professionals who utilize a variety of assessment tools and strategies to assess the student in all areas of suspected disability. Written reports prepared by child study team members contain the required components, and are consistently signed by the individual(s) who conduct the evaluation. These areas were accurately assessed by the district during the self-assessment process.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need pertaining to evaluation procedures including communication to parents in their native language, functional assessments, use of a severe discrepancy formula, documentation of written acceptance or rejection of outside assessments, and documentation of the impact of the disability in the classroom.

However, additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the student's ability to function in the native language and in English, and the written reports for students eligible for speech language services.

Area(s) of Need:

Language Functioning - The bilingual assessments did not consistently document how the student functions in both the native language and English.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that written bilingual assessments include documentation of the student's functioning in the native language and in English.**

Written Reports for students eligible for speech language services – Speech language specialists indicated that written reports are completed for all students

evaluated for speech language services. They indicated that these reports were located in the pupil records.

Upon review of pupil records written reports for students determined eligible for speech and language services were not consistently found. In the few records where they were maintained, reports did not contain documentation of a structured observation or teacher input, nor did they provide an explanation of how the speech disability is impacting educational performance in the classroom.

While interviews with speech language specialists and general education teachers indicated that regular dialogue concerning the students who are being evaluated, reports failed to reflect this information.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that all students classified as eligible for speech and language services have a written report in their record. Additionally, the reports must contain a structured observation, teacher input, and the impact of the student's disability in the classroom.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that by June 30 of the student's last year in a program for preschoolers with disabilities, a reevaluation is conducted and, if the student continues to be a student with a disability, the student is classified according to the code. The IEP team meets to review existing data to decide whether additional information is needed. For students eligible for special education and related services, notices are provided accordingly, and consent is obtained prior to conducting any additional assessments. These areas were accurately assessed by the district during the self-assessment process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need pertaining to meeting the three-year timelines for reevaluation.

However, additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding written notice and consent during the reevaluation process of students eligible for speech language services.

Area(s) of Need

Written notice – Speech language specialists reported that formatted notices of meetings and written notices are being utilized throughout the district. These formats were reviewed and reflect the different types of meetings that occur, including the reevaluation planning meeting. While a formatted written notice of the reevaluation planning meeting exists, this could not be located in the records of students going

through a reevaluation. During the interview process, parents indicated that reevaluation planning meetings do occur, however, documentation of these meetings was not maintained in student records.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure notice of reevaluation planning meetings is provided to parents within the required timelines and is maintained in the student record.**

Consent for reevaluations– Upon review of records for students eligible for speech language services, consent for reevaluations was not consistently maintained.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that consent for reevaluation is obtained from the parents of students eligible for speech language services, and that this consent is maintained in the student record.**

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

Interviews with school personnel, including guidance, administration, CST, and teachers (regular and special education), confirm that students with disabilities, including those in out-of-district placements are informed about and integrated in all graduation-related functions. Students in out-of-district settings are also given the choice of receiving a diploma from Tenafly High School or the school attended.

The district self-assessment did not identify any areas of need related to Graduation Requirements. However, additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring process regarding IEP documentation and written notice.

Areas of Need:

IEP Documentation of Graduation Requirements — Student IEPs include a graduation requirement sheet for all high school students. This document contains yes/no columns to indicate if there are to be any modifications to district-wide graduation requirements for each subject area. However, the actual credit/course requirements for the various subject areas are not specified on the form as required by NJAC 6A:14-4.12(a).

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure IEPs document specific course and credit requirements for graduation.**

Written Notice of Graduation — A review of student records indicated that a “written notice of graduation” is not being sent to parents and adult students. Interviews with administrators indicated that this requirement had not been implemented to date. Since graduation is defined as a “change in placement” written notice is required.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that written notice is provided to parents/adult students prior to high school graduation.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that programs and services are provided according to state requirements. Class size, age ranges, and speech/language therapy groups conform to N.J.A.C. 6A:14. Classroom aides are provided as needed. These areas were accurately assessed by the district during the self-assessment process.

However, an additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding county office approval for home instruction.

Area of Need:

Requests for County Office Approval for Home Instruction - Interviews indicated that although the district had only a small number of students on home instruction since January 2000, requests for county office approval had not been made.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that requests for approval to initiate a program of home instruction are submitted to the County Office of Education as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

The district ensures that student records are collected and secured in accordance with state and federal law and regulations. The district maintains a record of the parties other than parents, students or other individuals who are assigned educational responsibility who obtained access to a student's record. These were accurately assessed by the district during their self-assessment.

The district identified two areas of need during the self-assessment. These included the maintenance of student records and the destruction of student records.

However, an additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding documentation of the types and locations of student records collected and maintained by the district.

Area(s) of Need:

Documenting Types and Locations of Student Records – A review of randomly selected central files indicated that the district does not identify the types and locations of student records collected and maintained by the district.

- **The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that the district documents in the central files the types and locations of student records collected and maintained by the district.**

Summary

This on-site monitoring visit was conducted in Tenafly on October 2-4, 2000 after a public focus meeting. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to assist the district in developing and revising its improvement plan. Not only did the district self-identify a number of areas of need, but went on to identified areas that they believed could be improved to better serve the staff, parents and students of the district.

District staff were most accommodating during our visit. The district has moved forward with an LRE initiative that has resulted in a large percentage of their students with disabilities being educated in general education classes with supplementary aids and services and/or in-class support programs. Though some parents identified a few concerns, many expressed positive comments about the special education services in the district.

District strengths include their LRE initiative and the high degree of communication between the district and parents which is accomplished through monthly meetings with the Special Education Parents Liaison Group and through the publication of regular newsletters.

In addition to the areas of need self-identified by the district, the on-site team identified the need to review and revise district procedures regarding the referral process and the manner in which bilingual evaluations are conducted and reported. For those students identified as eligible for speech language services, areas of need were identified regarding written notice and consent. Documentation issues included graduation requirements in the IEP, requests for county office approval for home instruction, and the location of student records.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of this monitoring report, the district will revise and submit its improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.