

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Tewksbury Township School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: February 20, 2004

Monitoring Team: Nicole Buten and Kimberly Murray

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Tewksbury Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Tewksbury Township 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 Tewksbury Township 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 Old Turnpike School on February 10, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit on February 20, 2004, 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 and child study team members.

Data Summary:

The Tewksbury School District identified a classification rate over the last three years that has been consistently below the state average. A review of the district's self-assessment findings indicated the district has identified areas of need regarding Child Find activities that may be contributing to the lower classification rate. The district is commended for steadily increasing the number of students with disabilities who are

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

educated in the general education setting. During the 2002-2003 school year, more than 82% of the district's special needs students (41.6% is the state average) were educated in a general education setting for at least 80% of the school day.

The district's data show that 100% of their preschoolers with disabilities participate in a self-contained setting. In response to these data, the district indicated in the self-assessment the need to include a variety of options, including general education classes and early childhood settings, to the continuum of placement decisions for preschool students. The district's improvement plan will be sufficient to address this concern.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their "Project Tutor" program, an after school tutoring program for classified students who require additional help with assignments, homework, and organization.

The district is also commended for developing a parent training program offered to both parents of special education students as well as regular education students whose children are between pre-kindergarten and second grade. The training program runs monthly and offers a variety of relevant, educational topics to which parents may gain knowledge and insight into their child's education.

Finally, the district is commended for a grant entitled "*Supporting Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classrooms.*" The grant monies are used to provide innovative software and hardware for both regular education and special education students who benefit from the use of assistive technology. A key component of the grant allows an assistive technology consultant to provide both teacher and student training in the classroom. This infusion of technology benefits all students due to the fact that such a high number of special education students are included in the general education classrooms for the entire instructional day.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Evaluation, Reevaluation and Statewide Assessment 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, dissemination of IDEA information and parent training.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified 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, length of day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of frequency, location and duration of related services, provision of programs and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 areas of consent and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices, native language, independent evaluations and surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find and identification meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of the eligibility statement for students with a specific learning disability (SLD) and agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copies of evaluation reports to parents and adult students at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, IEPs to parents and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, implementation dates, annual review timelines and teacher access/responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 regular education access and the decision-making process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the full continuum of placement options, consideration of supplementary aids and services and notification and participation of nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 statement of transition service needs and preferences/interests survey/assessment. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of early intervention to preschool disabled program by age three and preschool transition planning conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment/behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards.

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

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

Section XIII: Graduation

As Tewksbury is a K-8 district, there are no findings in this area.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class sizes/waivers, age range/waivers and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of group sizes for speech therapy and consultation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets and documentation of other locations.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Area(s) of Need:

Maintenance of Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and record review that when a student is transitioning from the Tewksbury School District to the receiving high school district that the entire student record is transferred. The Tewksbury School District does not maintain copies of any portion of the student record. N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d) requires districts to maintain "mandated or permitted records required as part of programs established through state administered entitlement or discretionary funds from the U.S. Department of Education must be maintained for a period of five years after completion of program activities."

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure student records are maintained in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6:3-6.4(d). The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Tewksbury Township School District on February 20, 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 Tewksbury School District is commended for their exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring about systemic change. 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.

Evaluation, Reevaluation and Statewide Assessment were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The meeting, held on February 10, 2004, was attended by four parents. Additionally, four parents who were unable to attend the focus group meeting sent their comments in writing to the district. All of the parents reported satisfaction with their children's educational program. In addition, the parents stated that they were satisfied with the level of communication with district personnel. Parents also reported that they attended "meaningful" IEP meetings and felt they were considered valuable members of the IEP team.

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, parent training, extended school year, length of day and year, facilities and certifications, consent, participants, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings, meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of the eligibility statement for students with a specific learning disability (SLD), agreement/disagreement with eligibility, meeting/participants, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, regular education access, the decision-making process, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment/behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, class sizes/waivers, age range/waivers, home instruction, access sheets and documentation of pupil records at other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, frequency, location and duration of related services, provision of programs, transfer students, notices, native language, independent evaluations, surrogate parents, Child Find, identification meetings, copies of evaluation reports to parents and adult students at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, implementation dates, annual review timelines, teacher access/responsibility, full continuum of placement options, consideration of supplementary aids and services, notification and participation of nonacademic and extracurricular activities, age 14 statement of transition service needs, preferences/interests survey/assessment, documentation of suspension to case manager, group sizes for speech therapy, consultation and parental access/requests for pupil records.

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

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding maintenance of student records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Tewksbury Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the area that requires revisions.