

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

District: Tinton Falls School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: April 8, 2004 and May 17, 2004

Monitoring Team: Deborah Masarsky

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Tinton Falls School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Tinton Falls 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 Tinton Falls School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a comprehensive desk audit, held a public focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Swimming River School on May 3, 2004 and conducted parent interviews to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff from the office of Special Education Programs that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan that will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their ***Disability Awareness Program*** that is provided to students at the Atchison Elementary School. The purpose of this program is to raise awareness and develop tolerance towards students with disabilities. This program provides opportunities for social interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. This program provides all students with the opportunity to utilize what they have learned by practicing their social skills in their school and home communities.

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Data Summary:

A review of the district's data indicates a steady decline, from 24.1% in 1990 to 17% in 2002, in the district's classification rate. Because the rate is still above the state average of 13.4%, the district has developed an improvement plan to improve its pre-referral interventions/strategies for at-risk students.

Although the data reflect an increase in the number of students with disabilities ages 6-21 who spend more than 80% of their school day with their non-disabled peers, the district has developed an improvement plan that addresses individual decision-making, availability and provision of supplementary aids/services, the expansion of the continuum and staff training in an effort to increase the number of classified students who are educated in general education.

Furthermore, the data indicates that 100% of preschool disabled students have been placed in self-contained classes within the district for the past three school years. The district has recognized this as an area of need and has developed an appropriate improvement plan that will allow placement(s) of preschool disabled students in community-based preschool settings. Additionally, the district has developed a long-term plan to develop a regular education preschool program within the district.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Programs/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.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs/related services, IEP documentation of location of related services, facilities, certifications and length of school day/year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of district procedures regarding extended school year, hearing aids and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit regarding documentation of duration and frequency of counseling services, goals/objectives for counseling and documentation of duration of instructional time for in-class support.

Areas of Need:

Documentation of Counseling - It was determined that the district does not consistently document the duration and frequency of counseling services, but rather states that services will be provided "as needed."

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the frequency and duration of the counseling services are specifically identified in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure students are provided with the necessary services to enable them to gain the maximum educational benefit from their program.**

Goals and Objectives for Counseling - It was determined that the district does not consistently include goals/objectives for counseling in IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that goals and objectives for counseling services are developed and included in IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure related service providers provide the services required to address the students' therapy needs as well as have the ability to measure progress against established benchmarks.**

Documentation of Instructional Time for In-Class Support - It was determined that the district does not consistently include the duration of instructional time for in-class support in IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the duration of instructional time provided by the in-class support teacher is included in IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive the program and services determined necessary by the IEP team.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, provision of notices, notices in native language and interpreters at meeting.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the comprehensive desk audit regarding consent to implement initial IEPs.

Area of Need:

Consent to Implement Initial IEPs – It was determined that the district does not consistently obtain parental consent prior to the implementation of an initial IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district obtains parental consent prior to implementing an initial IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure the parent is fully informed and in agreement with the proposed placement prior to implementation.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of convening of evaluation planning meetings with required participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, direct referrals, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timelines, referral process and health summaries/vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments; written reports, functional assessments and multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services; and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nature and scope of evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports and functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services; and acceptance/rejection of outside reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of planning meetings with required participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of eligibility meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation of parents at eligibility conferences, copies of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility criteria for speech/language services, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and agreement/disagreement with eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of convening annual review meetings with required participants, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP considerations and required statements, IEPs to parents, adult students and teachers prior to implementation, IEPs in effect prior to implementation, present levels of educational performance statements (PLEPs), goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates on IEPs and teacher responsibility to implement IEPs.

An area of need was identified during the comprehensive desk audit regarding changes to IEPs without convening a meeting.

Area of Need:

Changes to IEPs - It was determined that the district does not consistently convene an IEP meeting when changes are made to a student's program/placement.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that an appropriately configured IEP team meeting is convened prior to making changes to a student's program or placement and that written notice is provided to the parent within fifteen days of the decision to change the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure all required members of the IEP team are a part of the decision-making process and that parents have the opportunity to disagree with the proposed changes. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the activities are implemented on a consistent basis.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the decision-making process, continuum of programs and access to general education and supplementary aids/services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the comprehensive desk audit regarding notification to out-of-district students regarding extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

Area of Need:

Notification to Out-of-District Students – It was determined that the district does not consistently provide notification to out-of-district students regarding extracurricular and non-academic activities. As a result, these students are not included in any of these activities.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all out-of-district students are notified of extracurricular and nonacademic activities offered within district. Implementation of these activities will ensure students in out-of-district placements are provided with the opportunity to participate in activities in the district with their non-disabled peers.**

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of student/agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the determination of student interests/preferences, post-secondary transition planning process and documentation within the transition statement for students age 14. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three.

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No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of student participation in statewide assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of modifications and accommodations and documentation of assessment titles or the APA. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of IEP documentation of graduation requirements.

No additional areas of need were identified during the comprehensive desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Tinton Falls School District on April 8, 2004 and May 17, 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 district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify all but a few areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. Additionally, the district is 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.

A review of the data indicated that the district has been able to lower their classification rate through the provision of staff training and by implementing more effective interventions in the regular education classroom. Additionally, the data indicated that for the last three years, less than half the students with disabilities have had the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers for a majority of the day. In response to this need, the district has developed an improvement plan to provide staff training regarding differentiated instruction and the individual decision-making process, as well as the availability and provision of supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom. The data further indicated that all preschool disabled students have been placed in self-contained classes within the district for the past three years. To address this area of need, the district has developed an improvement plan that will offer placements in community-based programs. To further address this need, the district has developed a long-term plan to develop an integrated preschool program within district.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and communication between themselves and staff. One parent expressed a concern regarding a personal aide. Some parents agreed that although the district has made considerable improvements in addressing parental concerns, the Board of Education remains a barrier to the provision of requested programs and services. The district's improvement plan has addressed parental concerns through the planned expansion of the continuum of programs and services and by convening appropriately configured meetings that would provide parents with the opportunity to be part a of the individual decision-making process for their child.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, parent/staff development, provision of programs/related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, provision of notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, evaluation planning meetings, standardized assessments, written reports/functional assessments and multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings, eligibility meetings, annual review meetings, annual review/90-day timelines, teacher access to IEPs, provision of student/agency invitations, preschool transition planning conferences, IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, interim alternative educational settings, student participation in statewide assessment, graduation requirement in students' IEPs, age

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range/waivers, class/group size, staff knowledge of student records policies/procedures, access to student records and documentation of other locations of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, hearing aid procedures, transfer students, content of notices, independent evaluations, child find activities, referral process, direct referrals, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timelines, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, nature/scope of evaluations, written reports/multidisciplinary evaluations/functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, 3-yr reevaluation timelines, reevaluations completed by June 30th of student's last year in preschool, participation of parents at the eligibility conference copies of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility criteria for speech and language services, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, agreement/disagreement with eligibility, IEP considerations/required statements, IEPs to parents/adult students/teachers prior to implementation, IEPs in effect prior to implementation, present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates on IEPs, teachers responsibility to implement IEPs, access to regular education, decision-making process, continuum of programs, supplementary aids/services, determination of students' interests/preferences, post-secondary transition planning process, documentation within the transition statement section of IEPs, documentation to case manager of student suspensions, suspension tracking of suspensions, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plans, modifications/accommodations for statewide assessments and documentation within the statewide assessment section of the IEP.

During the on-site visit additional areas of need were identified within the various standards regarding documentation of counseling in IEPs, goals and objectives for counseling, documentation of instructional time for in-class support, consent to implement initial IEPs, changes to IEPs and notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic and extracurricular activities in-district.

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