

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

District: Totowa School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: December 3, 4, 5, 2001

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills, Damen Cooper, Mitchell Badiner

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Totowa School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Totowa 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 Totowa 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 on November 19, 2001. 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 should be commended for the many cultural activities offered to all students at all grade levels, for its peer tutoring program, for the after school academic

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support/enrichment program, and for making community service opportunities available to students with disabilities.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Evaluation, Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, and Graduation Requirements were determined to be an area 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 areas of policies/procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff/professional development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding parent training/education.

Areas of Need:

Parent Development - During the public focus group meeting and the parent interview process an area of need was identified regarding parent training/education of issues related to special education.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents receive training regarding special education issues as they relate to their children’s disabilities. The plan must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area. The district also identified a concern regarding the need for an extended school year program. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district will revise its improvement plan to include this component.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities. The county office has been notified.

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of native language, documentation of attempts to obtain participation of fourteen year old students at transition meetings, and documentation of participation of parents at identification meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents - During the on-site visit it was determined the district lacks procedures to identify/train surrogate parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it appropriately identifies and trains surrogate parents in the event a surrogate parent is needed.**

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in Child Find activities for ages three to five, the referral process, summer referrals, vision/hearing screenings, and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding health summaries. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the age range for child find activities for students ages five to twenty-one.

Area of Need

Child Find - Although the district has policies and procedures regarding Child Find activities for ages 3-21, during the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district brochures targeted ages 3 to 5, only.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all materials related to Child Find activities provide information regarding students between the ages of three and twenty-one.**

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the provision of copies of reports to parents. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks adequate procedures and an administrative oversight component. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components to bring about the required changes.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations and required statements, alignment of goals/objectives with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines for students classified eligible for special education and related services, 90-day timelines, participants, and teacher access and knowledge of the IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of the provision of a copy of the IEP prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding annual review timelines for students classified as eligible for speech and language services only.

Area of Need:

Annual Review Timelines – During the on-site it was determined through a review of records and through the interview process that annual review timelines for students classified Eligible for Speech and Language Services timelines were not consistently met.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs are reviewed within twelve months of the previous review for students determined eligible for speech and language services.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of individualized decision-making, Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services, and regular education access for in-district students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of nonacademic/extracurricular participation of out-of-district students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district will revise its improvement plan to include this component. The district further identified a concern in the area of preschool continuum. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

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

X. Transition

Post-Secondary Transition:

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, and student preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of student/agency invitations. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this concern. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

Transition to Preschool:

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding participation in the preschool transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to preschool disabled by age three. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, speech and language group sizes, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding descriptions of special classes. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in parent/adult student access to records and maintenance and destruction of records.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding access sheets in student folders for students eligible for speech and language services and documentation of additional locations of student records.

Areas of Need:

Documentation of Student Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that central files do not document the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure central files identify the location of all records maintained by the district.**

Access Sheets - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that there were no access sheets in student files for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that access sheets are maintained in student files.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Totowa School District on December 3, 4, and 5, 2001. 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 thorough and 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 further 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. 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. Some parents expressed concerns regarding an age range issue and a facilities issue. They further indicated they would like to start a special education parent group.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included maintaining required policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of school day/year, certification, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, independent evaluations, the referral process, summer referrals, vision/hearing screenings, participants and timelines for identification meeting, all evaluation procedures, all reevaluation procedures, eligibility meeting and participants, criteria and documentation of eligibility, IEP considerations/required statements, alignment of the goals/objectives with core curriculum standards, IEP implementation dates, IEP timelines, teacher access/knowledge of IEP, individualized decision making, regular education access for in-district students, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, discipline procedures and standards, statewide assessments, graduation participation, class size, speech group size, home instruction, parent/adult student access to records, maintenance, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, extended school year, transfer students, documentation of attempts to obtain participation of 14 year old students, native language, documentation of identification meeting participants, health summaries, copy of evaluation reports to parents, provision of IEP to parent prior to implementation, participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities, preschool continuum, attendance at preschool transition planning conference, transition from early intervention to preschool program by age 3, invitation of student and agency to transition services meeting, and written descriptions of all special education classes offered by the district.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training/education, facilities, surrogate parents, Child Find activities, annual review timelines, access sheets in students' files, and documentation of the location of other student records.

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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.