

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

District: Tuckerton Borough School District

County: Ocean

Monitoring Dates: March 28, 2003

Monitoring Team: Stephen Coplin, Debbie Masarsky and Michelle Davis

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Tuckerton Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Tuckerton Borough 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 Tuckerton Borough 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 Tuckerton Elementary School on March 17, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, 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 administrator, building principal, speech therapist, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the “**Laptop Initiative Program**” that currently involves fourth, fifth and sixth grade special education students. These students have access to laptop computers that have the Herman Reading Program and Read 180 installed. Students use the laptop computers at school and at home to compose, edit and publish written assignments and essays. This program is funded through a federal grant. The

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

district has plans to expand this program to second and third grade students in the upcoming school year.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment, Transition 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/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff in-service training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service training.** The plan needs to be revised to include this element.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with goals and objectives for related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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, content/provision of notice of a meeting within timelines, content/provision of written notices within timelines, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified a concern with written notice provided within 20 days of a written parental request. **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 required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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, health summary, vision/hearing screenings and identification meetings within timelines with required participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with Child Find activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, functional assessments and signed/dated reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance/rejection of all or parts of reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting/participants and reevaluations by the June 30th of the student's last year in preschool.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 eligibility meetings/participants, eligibility criteria and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the eligibility statement for Specific Learning Disability.

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews and record review that for students determined eligible for special education/related services under the category of specific learning disability, the district does not document in the eligibility statement the specific area(s) of severe discrepancy between the student's current achievement and intellectual ability and does not state that the student's disability is not primarily a result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, general cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

- **The district needs to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when documenting eligibility for specific learning disability, the district includes all the components in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5(c)11. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations/required statements, implementation dates of IEPs, annual review/90-day timelines, provision of IEPs to parents, teachers' access/responsibilities related to IEPs, present levels of educational performance statements and annual goals/objectives related to core curriculum content standards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participants at IEP meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight**

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

component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

Section X: Transition to Post-School is not applicable in this pre-school - 6th grade district.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notification to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings and provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

Section XIII: Graduation is not applicable in this pre-school through 6th grade school district.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of sufficient staffing and group size for resource programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has obtained waivers from the county office of education regarding group size for resource programs

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

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of access to student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of student record policies/procedures. 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 documentation of other location(s) of student records.

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations of Student Records - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not document the location of other student record(s) in the central file.

- **The district needs to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the location of other student record(s) in the central file.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Tuckerton Borough School District on March 28, 2003. 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 two minor areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revisions 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. They praised the district for the amount of communication they had with staff and for the provision of related services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included the policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certification, consent, content/provision of notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, pre-referral interventions, direct referral from parents/staff, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings timelines/participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility criteria, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP considerations/required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates on IEPs, annual review/90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, individualized decision making process, supplementary aids/services, continuum, LRE considerations, participation of in-district students in non-academic/extra-curricular activities, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention to preschool disabled program by age three, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational setting, provision of procedural safeguard rights, participation in statewide assessments, accommodation/modification in statewide assessments, Alternate Proficiency Assessment, age range, group size for speech, home instruction and access to student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff in-service training, goals/objectives for related services, surrogate parents, provision of written notice within 20 days of a parental request, Child Find activities, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluations within three years or sooner if warranted, participants at IEP meetings, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, insufficient staffing, group size for resource programs and staff knowledge of student record policies/procedures.

The on-site visit identified only two minor areas of need within the various standards regarding statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and documentation of other locations of student records.

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

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