

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Upper Freehold Regional School District

County: Monmouth

Monitoring Dates: May 8 and 9, 2006

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Jane Marano and Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Upper Freehold Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Upper Freehold Regional School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Upper Freehold Regional 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by phone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district reported a classification rate of 12.33% which was lower than the state rate of 16.8% for that year. The district educated 67.9% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. A total of 29.4% of students with disabilities were educated in general education from 40-80% of the school day with no students reported as educated in self-contained settings. The number of students with disabilities placed in separate public or private settings decreased to 2.7% in 2005, a rate which was significantly below the state rate of 9.2% for that same year.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the 2005-2006 school year, the district also reported that 27% of preschool students with disabilities were educated in general education for all or a portion of the school day. This placement rate is above the state rate for that year of 19.9%; however, the district developed improvement plan activities to expand general education opportunities for preschoolers. The district has established an inclusive preschool program and anticipates that more preschool students with disabilities will have the opportunity to be educated with their typical peers.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the district's self-assessment committee and by NJDOE as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation • Provision of programs • Provision of related services • Transfer procedures
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent • Implementation without undue delay • Provision of notice of a meeting • Meetings • Interpreters at meetings • Independent evaluations

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

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find Ages 3-21 • Referral process • Direct referrals • Health summary • Identification meeting timelines • Identification meeting participants
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary evaluations • Standardized assessments • Functional assessments • Bilingual evaluations • Written reports prepared by evaluators
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting participants • Eligibility criteria • Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale • Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability) • Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESERS)
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of “needed transition services” • Identification of post-secondary liaison • Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings • Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of Noncompliance - Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district's self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The table includes the results of the review of the district's improvement plan and identifies those areas where correction of noncompliance was verified during the on-site visit.

Section	Area	Compliance Review
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content of notice of a meeting – Notice of a meeting does not include transition as a purpose of the meeting when required. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an administrative oversight component to ensure ongoing compliance.
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-referral interventions – Implementation of intervention and referral service procedures have been inconsistent. There is no systematic method for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions implemented within the general education setting. 	The improvement plan is sufficient.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational impact statement (ESLS) - Speech-language evaluation reports do not document the educational impact of the speech problem as described by the general education teacher. 	The district demonstrated compliance in this area with an administrative oversight component to ensure ongoing compliance.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district – The district does not have a mechanism to notify parents of students placed in out-of-district settings of nonacademic and extracurricular activities. ▪ Continuum of programs – General education placement options for preschool students with disabilities have been limited due to lack of space in district buildings and lack of other available options. ▪ Placement decisions based on students' individual needs – Students with behavior issues have been placed in off-site programs due to lack of space in district buildings and availability of support services. 	<p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p>

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

Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant, but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE, during the on-site monitoring.

Section	Area	Improvement Activity
Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	Extended School Year – The need for extended school year (ESY) services is not considered and documented for all students. In addition, when the student will require an ESY program, the IEP does not consistently include a description of the program.	The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that a discussion of the need for extended school year services occurs for all students and that the results of this discussion are documented in all IEPs, including a description of the program for students who will require such services. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.
	Provision of written notice – A copy of N.J.A.C. 1:6A is not provided to parents at the time of the identification meeting. The district currently provides the document at the eligibility conference.	The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that a copy of N.J.A.C. 1:6A is provided to parents at the time that consent for evaluation is requested. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.
	Content of written notice – Written notice following an evaluation planning conference does not contain a clear description of the action being proposed and the explanation of why the district is proposing such action. In some	The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that written notice of a proposal to evaluate or not to evaluate a student includes all the required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the written notices developed by the OSEP available at http://www.state.nj.us/education . The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.

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

Section	Area	Improvement Activity
	<p>cases, the evaluation plans are confusing to the reader as to whether or not an evaluation will be conducted.</p> <p>Notices in native language – Although invitations to meetings are provided in the parent’s native language, and translators are available at conferences, written notice of the decisions made at meetings is not consistently provided in the native language of the parent.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>
Location, Referral, Identification	<p>Vision and hearing screenings—Vision and hearing screenings are not consistently conducted prior to the identification meeting when parents are the source of referral.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that vision and hearing screenings are conducted prior to identification meetings and that this information is available at the time of the meeting. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>
Eligibility	<p>Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS)– Copies of speech-language evaluation reports are not consistently provided to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility conference.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that parents are provided with copies of speech-language evaluation reports 10 days prior to eligibility conferences. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>

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

Section	Area	Improvement Activity
LRE	<p>Documentation of LRE decisions</p> <p>Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs</p>	<p>Although the district's placement data indicate that the majority of students are in less restrictive environments, due to the lack of a full continuum of programs and services and individual placement decision making, as identified by the district during self-assessment, the district must ensure that documentation of placement decisions reflects access to all general education programs.</p>
Transition to Adult Life	<p>Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of "transition service needs" –Although the IEP format includes this element, it is not consistently addressed for students who will turn fourteen during the implementation period of the IEP being developed.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that IEPs address transition planning for all students who are turning 14. The district must also conduct in-service and administrative oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Upper Freehold Regional School District on May 8 and 9, 2006. 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about correction of noncompliance. The district is further acknowledged for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the OSEP as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district reported a classification rate of 12.33% which was lower than the state rate of 16.8% for that year. The district educated 67.9% of students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. A total of 29.4% of students with disabilities were educated in general education from 40-80% of the school day with no students reported as educated in self-contained settings. The number of students with disabilities placed in separate public or private settings decreased to 2.7% in 2005, a rate which was significantly below the state rate of 9.2% for that same year.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the district also reported that 27% of preschool students with disabilities were educated in general education for all or a portion of the school day. This placement rate is above the state rate for that year of 19.9%; however, the district developed improvement plan activities to expand general education opportunities for preschoolers. The district has established an inclusive preschool program and anticipates that more preschool students with disabilities will have the opportunity to be educated with their typical peers.

During interviews conducted with parents by telephone, parents expressed satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. However, parents did express concerns regarding facilities and space issues, provision of speech-language services, communication with parents and training for teachers on subjects relating to students with disabilities. The district is addressing the overcrowded facilities with the planned construction of a new school building. The district has also addressed parent communication and staff development concerns through their improvement plan. Finally, parents raised concerns regarding referral procedures and difficulty obtaining child study team evaluations. Monitoring activities determined compliance with referral procedures and the district is addressing pre-referral interventions for at-risk students for whom an evaluation is not warranted through their improvement plan.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- General Provisions
- Reevaluation
- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Graduation
- Programs & Services

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included:

- Oversight of individualized education program (IEP) implementation
- Provision of programs
- Provision of related services
- Transfer procedures
- Consent
- Implementation without undue delay
- Provision of notice of a meeting
- Meetings
- Interpreters at meeting
- Independent evaluations
- Child Find Ages 3-21
- Referral process
- Direct Referrals
- Health summary
- Identification meeting timelines
- Identification meeting participants
- Multi-disciplinary evaluations
- Standardized Assessments
- Functional assessments
- Bilingual evaluations
- Written reports prepared by evaluators
- Meeting participants
- Eligibility Criteria
- Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale
- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESERS)
- Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of "needed transition services"
- Identification of post-secondary liaison
- Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings
- Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student's desired outcomes

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE included:

- Content of notice of a meeting
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding:

- Pre-referral interventions
- Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district
- Continuum of programs
- Placement decisions based on students' individual needs

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding:

- Extended school year
- Provision of written notice
- Content of written notice
- Notice in native language
- Vision and hearing screenings
- Copy of evaluation reports to parents (ESLS)

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

- Documentation of LRE decisions
- Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs
- Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs”

The improvement plan submitted to the OSEP has been approved. The district is expected to implement the activities described in the monitoring report to achieve compliance in all areas of need identified during self-assessment, and areas of need identified during the on-site visit, within six months of the date of this report. Verification of compliance will be conducted by the County Office of Education.