

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

District: Upper Pittsgrove School District

County: Salem

Monitoring Dates: May 25, 2004

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Upper Pittsgrove 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 Pittsgrove 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 Upper Pittsgrove 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 Upper Pittsgrove Elementary School on April 28, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Approximately fifteen persons attended this meeting, including parents and school district personnel. Parents expressed some concern over the amount of turnover in recent years with child study team personnel, as well as the amount of turnover in support staff. No additional areas of need were identified that had not already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Overall, parents reported satisfaction with the current level of special education and case management services provided by the district.

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, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

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District Strengths:

The district is commended for providing several specialized programs to improve reading and math skills for all students. These programs include the Rigby Reading Program and Trail Blazer Math. In addition, the district provides an after school assistance program (ASAP) to provide academic support for students in grades K through eight. One of the district's special education teachers also runs an after school Read Aloud Book Club in which students have an opportunity to read current literature.

Part One Data Summary:

The Upper Pittsgrove Township School District reported a classification rate of 17.2% for the 2002-2003 school year, which is above the state average of 13.4%. As a result of the self-assessment process, the district has identified classification rate as an area of concern and has developed activities to address this need through their improvement plan. A review of that plan indicated it was not sufficient to address this area. As such, revisions to the plan will need to be made.

The data submitted by the district indicates 85.7% of classified preschool students are placed in general education settings which is considerably above the state average of 13.5%. The district currently houses an on-site community-based preschool program, which has facilitated the provision of special education services for these students within a regular education setting. In addition, the district places approximately 45% of their students in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day which is on par with the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Evaluation, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, and dissemination of IDEA information.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding professional development for teachers.

Area(s) of Need:

Professional Development - During the on-site monitoring interviews with school personnel indicated that while the trend is for more students to be placed in regular education settings within the district, this has created a need for more training for teachers on inclusive practices and behavioral supports. This is supported in the data gathered by the district during the self-assessment process indicating that during both

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the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years, a small percentage and in some case no regular education or special education teachers received training on effective inclusion strategies and positive behavioral supports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that professional development opportunities are provided for special education and general education teachers on topics related to inclusion and positive behavioral supports. The implementation of these activities will result in teachers having the necessary support required to effectively accommodate students in general education settings. It will also result in students receiving the maximum educational benefit from their programs. The improvement plan must include a mechanism for conducting a needs assessment as well as a method to determine the effectiveness of any training opportunities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, procedures for identifying and training surrogate parents, provision of written notice, conducting required meetings, provision of notice in native language, and procedures for conducting independent evaluations when required.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of notice of a meeting for the purpose of discussing transition services to students who will be turning 14. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because although the activities have begun to be implemented, the plan does not identify what administrative oversight activities will be conducted to ensure that any new procedures are consistently followed. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants for preschoolers.

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Participants for Preschool - During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel and a review of student records indicates that a regular education teacher is not consistently in attendance for meetings regarding preschoolers. The district currently has a curriculum specialist who attends as the regular education teacher; however, she does not have direct teaching responsibility for students and therefore cannot attend the meetings in that capacity.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a general education teacher attends meetings for preschool students. The implementation of these activities will result in all the required participants being involved in the decision-making process for preschool students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

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Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, timelines for conducting identification meetings, and participants other than preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for logging in initial referrals and conducting vision/hearing screenings for preschool students. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding the district's special education classification rate. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because although the plan identifies several new programs that will be implemented to serve at-risk youth, the plan does not identify specifics as to how these new programs will be implemented or the follow-up activities that will be conducted to determine if these new programs have had an impact on the district's classification rate. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

No additional area of need was 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 procedures for conducting eligibility meetings, appropriate application of eligibility criteria, documentation of eligibility determinations, and provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of signatures of agreement and/or disagreement with the eligibility determination for students eligible for speech-language services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional area of need was 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 IEP meeting participants other than preschool, IEP goals and objectives, IEP implementation dates, procedures for revising IEPs, age of majority, and annual review and 90-day timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for informing teachers of their responsibilities for implementing IEPs. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding documentation in the IEP of the consideration of transition needs for students turning age 14. **Although the district has begun to implement the new procedures, the district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that these new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency invitations, and agency involvement in the transition planning process.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consideration of transition service needs for students turning 14. **Although the district has begun to implement new procedures, the district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that these new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of attendance at preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs by the student's third birthday.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, group size for speech therapy, provision of homebound instruction, and common planning time for resource teachers.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding group size for preschool in-class support.

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Area(s) of Need:

Group Size for Preschool In-Class Support - During the on-site monitoring a review of class lists and classroom observations noted that there are currently nine students in the in-class support preschool program. This exceeds the number allowable by code.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that group sizes for in-class support are maintained within the limits required by code. The implementation of these activities will result in the district being able to more effectively provide services within the preschool environment ensuring that students have the opportunity to derive full educational benefit from their programs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Upper Pittsgrove School District on May 25, 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 this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, a number of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. 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 data submitted by the district during the self-assessment process indicates a classification rate which is well above the state average. The district has developed activities to address this need through their improvement plan. Additionally, the district has reported positive trends in student placement in general education settings. Preschool students are placed in general education at rates that are above the state average. Parents and staff members view these positive trends as reflective of the small community atmosphere within the district.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Evaluation, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Student Records 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. Parents did express some concern regarding turnover with child study team and support personnel, however they expressed satisfaction with the current level of services within the district. No additional areas were identified at this meeting that had not already been addressed during the self-assessment process.

In addition to the standards identified above, areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, eligibility determination, IEP development, procedures for revising IEPs, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews and evaluations, preschool transition, and provision of programs and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding notice of a meeting and transition planning for students who will be turning 14, procedures for logging in initial referrals, conducting vision/hearing screenings for preschool students, classification rates, documentation of signatures of agreement and/or disagreement with the eligibility determination for students eligible for speech-language services, and procedures for notifying teachers of their responsibilities regarding IEP implementation.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding professional development, meeting participants for preschool, and group size for preschool in-class support.

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