

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



District: Upper Township School District

County: Cape M

Monitoring Dates: October 1, 2, and 3, 2001

Monitoring Team: Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin, Ken Richards

Background Information

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Upper Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self- assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Upper Township 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 Township 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 at Upper Township Middle School on September 25, 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 administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district has implemented the Fast ForWord program for students with weaknesses in phonemic awareness. The district should be commended for the commitment of both time and resources in the training and implementation of this highly individualized program.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district completed a 2.5-year grant for staff development this past March. The district served as the lead agency for the Cape May County Consortium for Professional Development, which provided a multitude of training opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals regarding the inclusion of students with mild to severe learning difficulties.

The district provides an “outward bound” program for district seventh-grade exceptional students. Both students eligible for special education and related services as well as students identified as gifted and talented participate in this environmental learning program. Activities focus on developing independent living skills, coping skills, and developing relationships. This program is funded through a combination of federal and local sources, including local fund-raising efforts.

This year, the district has expanded its Adaptive Living Skills program to include setting up a classroom as an apartment. The classroom is located in close proximity to classrooms housing kitchen and laundry facilities. This will allow for expanded learning opportunities in daily living skills.

The district provides assistive technology to disabled students and there are a number of classrooms throughout the district that have been looped for amplification in conjunction with FM systems.

The district should be commended for its continued commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities and for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs, including the provision of extensive teacher and aide training. The district’s child study team members should also be commended for the level of documentation maintained in student files.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Reevaluation and Transition to Preschool 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 IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional development. Although the district’s improvement plan did not identify a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts, on-site monitoring indicated that the district has a successful mechanism in place. Therefore, the district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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

Section II: F.A.P.E.

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 and year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer procedures and ensuring the proper functioning of hearing aids. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address both issues.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documenting the provision of speech/language therapy in the IEP.

Areas of Need:

Speech/Language Services-- On site record review determined that IEPs identify frequency, duration and location of speech/language services. However, the IEPs for students receiving speech/language as a related service do not consistently specify individual or group therapy. In addition, IEPs for some students indicate that speech/language therapy is to be provided on a direct/integrative/consultative basis. Although the therapists communicate the method of service delivery to the parents on a regular basis, the criteria for the provision of this service is not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan that identifies the procedures that will be implemented to ensure that IEPs for students receiving speech/language as a related service specify individual or group therapy.**
- **The district will develop an improvement plan that identifies the procedures that will be implemented to ensure that IEPs identify the criteria for provision of direct/integrative/consultative speech/language therapy.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, meeting notices, written notice, meetings, meeting participants for school-aged students, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants at the preschool level.

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

Areas of Need:

Meeting Participants for Preschool—During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff and parents indicated that regular education teachers are not consistently in attendance at preschool meetings. Scheduling difficulties were reported as one of the barriers to compliance.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan that identifies the procedures that will be implemented to ensure that regular education teachers are in attendance at preschool meetings, as required.**

Section IV: Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, summer referrals, and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of direct referrals and identification of referred students as potentially disabled. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. In addition, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summaries and vision/hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues.

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

Areas of Need:

Vision and Hearing Screenings—During the self-assessment process, the district indicated that information regarding vision and hearing screenings were not consistently provided according to state regulation. The district has developed an improvement plan to ensure that the information is provided, but what additional activities will be implemented to ensure that this information is received by the time the identification meeting is conducted? In addition, the plan is lacking an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to identify the procedures that will ensure that information regarding vision and hearing screenings is provided by the identification meeting. The plan must include a mechanism for administrative oversight.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments for speech-language and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. In addition, the district identified concerns with informal measures for re-evaluations. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because an administrative oversight component is lacking. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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, criteria for determining eligibility, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section VIII: Individual Education Program

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP components, implementation dates, annual review timelines, initial evaluation timelines, and teacher knowledge of and access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals and objectives and CCCSs and transfer of rights at the age of majority. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, provision of supplementary aids and services, and continuum of services for school-aged children.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extra-curricular participation for out-of-district students and provision of instruction related to CCCSs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. In addition, the district identified concerns in the area of consideration of regular education as a first placement option for preschool students. The district's

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

improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component. 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 from School to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of student interests and preferences, the statement of transition service needs, and linkages to community resources. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. In addition, the district identified concerns in the area of student invitations. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue.

Areas of Need:

Student Invitation—During the self-assessment process, the district indicated that students who are fourteen are not consistently invited to IEP meetings when the purpose is to discuss transition activities. Improvement plan activities include maintaining a list of 14-year old students to ensure that they are invited to IEP meetings. These activities must be revised to include the students who will be turning 14 prior to their next annual review.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that students who will turn 14 prior to their next scheduled annual review are consistently invited to participate in IEP meetings.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of discipline procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative education settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of removals to the case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, provision of approved accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of alternate assessments and CST knowledge of assessment content. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

Although this district serves grades K-8 only, students exiting grade 8 are provided with the opportunity to participate in promotion exercises. The district accurately assessed compliance in this area.

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, group size for speech therapy, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of descriptions of special class programs, provision of the team-teaching model, and provision of consultation time for resource teachers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, documenting access to pupil records and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of student records.

Area of Need:

Location of Student Records- During the on-site visit, a review of pupil records indicated that although a statement of the district's record policy is provided to parents in the district handbook/calendar, the student's main folder does not document where other records may be located. At the middle school level, cumulative folders include a place to identify other locations, however this section was left blank.

- **The district is directed to develop an improvement plan including an administrative oversight component to ensure that student records identify the locations where other records may be found.**

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

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Upper Township School District on October 1, 2, and 3, 2001. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify

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

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 also 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. The district is further commended for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs for students with disabilities and for the level of documentation maintained by child study team members in student files.

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.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures for special education, extended school year, provision of special education and related services, facilities, certification, consent, written notice, native language, bilingual evaluations, independent evaluations, Child Find and referral procedures, timelines for evaluations, reevaluations, notice and annual reviews, use of multi-disciplinary assessments, eligibility documentation, IEP components, teacher knowledge and access to IEPs, individualized decision-making, provision of supplementary aids and services, preschool transition, discipline procedures, accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, transfer procedures, ensuring the proper functioning of hearing aids, provision of health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, components of speech evaluations, informal assessment measures, documentation of the acceptance or rejection of reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents, special class program descriptions, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities for students placed out-of-district, continuum of options for preschool students, school-to-work transition, participation in alternate assessments, IEP goals and objectives and their relation to the CCCs, the transfer of rights at the age of majority, provision of the team-teaching model of instruction, and documentation to case managers of disciplinary removals of classified pupils.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding preschool meeting participants, IEP documentation of speech/language therapy, and documentation of locations of student records.

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.