

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

**District:** Verona School District

**County:** Essex

**Monitoring Dates:** February 4, 5 and 6, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Janet Wright, Damen Cooper, Thomas Walsh, and Susan Smahl

**Background Information**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Verona School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Verona 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 Verona 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 January 29, 2002 at H.B. Whitehome Middle School. 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 its commitment to inclusive education and for its preschool disabled/autistic program.

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The Creative Fine Arts Festival is held every year at the high school. This program allows students to display work in all artistic areas.

Students in the Alternative Program at the high school participate in a competitive nationwide stock market program. These same students also conduct fundraisers for toys for pre-k to second grade students at a Newark elementary school. The students from the alternative class raise the money and assist in the shopping, wrapping and delivery of the toys to the students in the school. They deliver these toys dress up as Santa and his elves and spend the day with the children as they deliver their gifts class by class.

Forest Avenue Elementary School offers a program in Mandarin language acquisition for all students in grades one through five. This program was originally funded with a Dodge Foundation Grant and will be extended next year to the sixth grade.

An outdoor education program is offered at the elementary schools. A retired teacher who works as a consultant to the schools conducts this program. Some of the schools have developed a number of beautiful nature paths, but at the FN Brown Elementary School, they also developed a butterfly garden.

The Seeking Educational Equality and Diversity (S.E.E.D.) program is offered district wide. The SEED program is a national faculty development program that focuses on making school climates and teaching materials more inclusive with regard to gender, race, class, and culture.

**Area Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:**

**Eligibility** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified 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 area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures and professional/parent development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**II. F.A.P.E.**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of related services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and hearing aids. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of extended school year.

**Area of Need:**

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site it was determined through staff and parent interviews that although the district routinely offers a voluntary academic summer enrichment program for all students, they do not consider the need for specific extended school year programs for all classified students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year is considered for each student with a disability. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to document those considerations, in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**III. Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings and written notice. 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 elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services.

**Area of Need:**

**Notices of Meetings/Meeting Participants** – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that notices for evaluation planning meetings were not consistently provided to parents. Speech therapist indicated that evaluation planning meetings were conducted over the phone with only the parent and speech therapist in attendance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in meetings with**

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**required personnel to determine the nature and scope of the evaluation. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure the district maintains documentation of the provision of the notice of a meeting. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**IV. Location, Referral, Identification**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals and Identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified an additional area of need in the area of pre-referral interventions. No improvement plan was submitted to address this area. The district will revise its improvement to include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

**Area of Need:**

**Child Find** – During the on-site visit, it was determined the district has limited its implementation of Child Find activities to students between the ages of three and five.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure Child Find activities are conducted to locate refer and identify students between the ages of three and twenty-one, including migrant and homeless children. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**V. Evaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified itself compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and the acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments. No improvement plan was submitted. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports.

**Area of Need:**

**Written Reports-** During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that speech assessment reports include statements regarding eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure individual reports do not contain statements of eligibility. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**VI. Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluation participants and turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines. The district's plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

**VIII. Individual Education Program**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of ninety-day timelines and teacher knowledge/access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of age of majority. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of IEP participants, considerations/required statements, goal and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS) and implementation dates. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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**IX. Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti factors, considerations/documentations, supplemental aids and services and nonacademic/extracurricular activities. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**X. Transition**

**Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the transition of early intervention program students to preschool disabled class by age three. The 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 elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding preschool transition planning conferences.

**Area of Need:**

**Preschool Transition Planning Conference** – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicated district personnel are not consistently invited to attend preschool transition planning conferences.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure its attendance at preschool transition conferences. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Transition from School to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs, courses of study, preferences/interests and age sixteen needed transition services. The

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improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**XI. Discipline**

**Summary of findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessment and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager and manifestation determinations. The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of content of statewide assessments and testing accommodations and modifications. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**XIII. Graduation**

**Summary of Findings**

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and choice of diploma for out-of-district students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participation of out-of-district students. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

**Area of Need:**

**Written Notice of Graduation** – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicates the district provides notice of graduation before the student has met all graduation requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure written notice of graduation is provided to parents/adult students only when the district believes the student has met all graduation requirements. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the notice form developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

**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 providing a description of the team teaching model to the county office and preschool options. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas 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 the areas of parent/adult student access, access sheets, and the maintenance and destruction of records

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

**Areas of Need:**

**Documentation of Locations** – During the on-site, a review of records indicated that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.



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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure central files identify the locations of other student records maintained by the district.**

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**Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Verona School District on February 4, 5 and 6, 2002. The purpose of this 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 enough 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, the three parents in attendance expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Parents indicated that there is excellent communication between themselves and child study members. Parents also indicated they were extremely pleased with the support groups that are offered in the district. These comments were confirmed through the telephone interview process conducted during the on-site visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, native language, independent evaluations, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluation participants, turning age five, eligibility, ninety-day timeline, teacher knowledge/access, continuum, regular education access, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative educational settings, statewide assessment participation and documentation, alternate assessments, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP requirements for graduation, diploma, class sizes, age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction approvals, parent/adult student access to student records, access sheets and the maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional/parent development, related services staffing and transportation services, transfer students, maintenance of hearing aids, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notice, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, documentation of pre-referral intervention, functional assessment, reevaluation timelines, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, alignment of goals and objectives to the CCCS, implementation dates, annual review timelines, age of majority, Oberti factors, individual decision making, considerations and documentation, nonacademic/extracurricular participation, supplemental aids and services, transition of early intervention students to preschool disabled class by age three, transition from school to post-school, documentation to the case manager, manifestation determinations, staff knowledge of testing accommodations/modifications and content, participation of out-of-district students in graduation, providing a description of the team teaching model to the county office, preschool options, and staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, notices of meetings, Child Find, identification meeting participants, documentation of eligibility in speech and language assessments, attendance at preschool transition planning conferences, written notice of graduation 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.