

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

District: Voorhees Township School District

County: Camden

Monitoring Dates: April 9, 10, 11 and 12, 2002

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin, Jane Marano, Kenneth Richards

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Voorhees Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Voorhees 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 Voorhees 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 the Signal Hill Elementary School on March 21, 2002. 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 is commended for the development of such programs as the Homework Helpers, the Teacher Mentor Program and Peer Helpers that offer support and

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assistance to all students including those students with disabilities. Students also benefit from participation in Circle of Friends and Friendship Clubs that enhance socialization and relationships among disabled and nondisabled students. The district has also developed programs that include distance learning opportunities and academic enrichment opportunities for students thereby creating a diversified learning experience. The district has also developed partnerships with the community that have enhanced services such family counseling and recreation programs.

Under the direction of the Director of Special Services, the district has developed a comprehensive CST Compliance Checklist that has been placed in every CST folder. This checklist provides the case manager with a chronology of required activities that need to be followed from the time of the initial referral through re-evaluation.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

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.

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. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

No additional areas of need were 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 and year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documenting the duration of related services. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding frequency and duration of related services.

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Areas of Need:

Frequency and Duration of Related Services – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review that therapists do not specify the frequency and duration of services in the IEP. Instead, they list a range of time for these services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district identifies the specific frequency and duration of related services in the IEP. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedure.**

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, speech and language services, consent, notice of meetings, and written notice. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

Area of Need:

Notice of Meeting - During the on-site, a review of records indicated that staff identified in the notice of a meeting as participants in scheduled meetings did not consistently attend those meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff identified as participants in the notice of a meeting are in attendance at the meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedure.**

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find activities, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and documenting acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of bi-lingual evaluations, speech and language services, multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments and written reports. The improvement plan is sufficient for all areas except the area of bi-lingual evaluation 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 written reports.

Area of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site visit, record review and information obtained during staff interviews determined that although Child Study Team members are signing their written reports, they are not consistently dating them.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Study Team reports are consistently dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of this procedure.**

VI. Reevaluation

During self assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, timelines and conducting reevaluations by June 30th of the student's last year in a program for preschool students with disabilities.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation planning meetings.

Area of Need:

Reevaluation – During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that at the annual review meeting for those students who will require a reevaluation by the following school year, the district conducts a reevaluation planning meeting, reviews data, and, if necessary, obtains consent to conduct assessments. However, that evaluation is not implemented until the following school year. Because

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there is a significant gap between the review of data and the date of implementation of the decisions made as a result of that review, the data are no longer current. As such, decisions made at the time of the review may no longer be valid.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at the reevaluation planning meeting, the district conducts a review of existing data and makes decisions based on that data that are implemented without undue delay. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of criteria, meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of evaluation reports to parents and documentation of eligibility. The improvement plan is sufficient to address the issue of documentation of eligibility. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address the provision of evaluation reports because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, implementation dates, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives aligned to the CCCS, annual review timelines and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age of majority and teacher access/knowledge. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concerns.

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

Area of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the IEP does not include a description of the extended year program, goals and objectives, or an implementation date for the extended school year services.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP contains a description of the ESY program, the implementation date, and goals and objectives for the extended year services if they differ from those goals and objectives addressed during the school year. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, IEP considerations and documentation, provision of supplemental aids and services, regular education access and participation in nonacademic and extra curricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of a disproportionate ratio of African-American male students being removed from regular education. The district has attended technical assistance sessions sponsored by the Office for Civil Rights and the Office of Special Education Programs. Staff from these offices will determine the appropriateness of activities identified in the improvement plan.

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

X. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, BIP/FBA, manifestation determinations and IAES.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager and suspension tracking. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP requirements.

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Area of Need:

IEP Requirements - During the on-site visit, record review and information obtained during staff interviews indicated that high school graduation requirements are not consistently documented for students beginning at age 14; these requirements are only identified for students in the eighth grade.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure high school graduation requirements are documented in IEPs beginning at age 14. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consultation time, age range, class size and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of group size for speech therapy, provision of in-class resource programs, and case management responsibilities. The improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of group size. The improvement plan is not sufficient to address case management responsibilities because it lacks appropriate procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The improvement plan is insufficient to address in-class resource programs because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 to records, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of access. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Voorhees Township School District on April 9, 10, 11, and 12, 2002. 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 be sufficient 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, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents also stated that the district makes every effort to make the transition from elementary school to the middle school smooth for both the student and the parent. Furthermore, parents praised the child study team members and the teachers for their work with the children. Some parents expressed concerns about knowledge of the content of IEPs by instructional staff members at the middle school level.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included maintaining required policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day and year, facilities, transfer students, certifications, native language, meetings, independent evaluations, child find activities, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meetings and participants, standardized assessments, documenting acceptance/rejection of reports, re-evaluation planning meetings, timelines, participants, eligibility meetings and participants, IEP participants, implementation dates, considered/required statements, goals and objectives/CCCCS, annual review and 90 day timelines, individual decision making, IEP considerations and documentation, the provision of supplemental aides and services, regular education access, participation in non academic and extra curricular activities, discipline procedures, BIP/FBA, IAES, manifestation determination meetings, diploma and participation, consultation time, age range, class size, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, related services, surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, bilingual evaluations, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of eligibility, age of majority, teacher knowledge/access, placement considerations, suspension tracking and documentation to case manager, documenting group size for speech services, in-class resource programs, case management responsibilities, access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, consent, notice of meetings, written reports, re-evaluation planning meetings and documenting graduation requirements.

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

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the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.