

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

District: Walkkill Valley Regional School District **County:** Sussex

Monitoring Dates: June 1, 2, 3, 2004

Monitoring Team: Carol Raff, Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Walkkill Valley 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 Walkkill Regional 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 Walkkill Valley 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.

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 Walkkill Valley Regional School on May 27, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

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 administrators, speech therapist and child study team members.

District Strengths:

Walkkill Valley is strongly committed to the concept of having students remain connected with their community. Since Walkkill Valley is a receiving district from four neighboring elementary schools they consistently look for opportunities to integrate these students into the high school. Additionally, this past year, five students were successfully returned

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from out-of-district settings where they had been placed by the elementary school districts.

The district is also commended for encouraging their special needs students to take advantage of all possible elective classes, sports teams, school clubs and organizations. Many students have taken advantage of these opportunities and as a result have excelled. The district also maintains a strong working relationship among the Superintendent, child study team members and students.

The district takes great pride in the accomplishments and contributions of its students to the school and community. A number of special education students have achieved striking accomplishments as well. Specifically, some students achieved first place as national and state winners for Future Business Leaders of America, one student is the president of the student council, another student is a state wrestling champion, while others are in the National Honor Society and are recipients of scholarships.

Data Summary:

The Wallkill Regional School District reports 37.7% of its students are placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day. This is below the state average of 41.6% for 2002. Similarly, the district reports that 38.6% of their special education students spend between forty and eighty percent of the day with general education students. The district indicates that as a Regional High School District, the majority of students in separate settings have transferred in from sending districts. As such, 20.2% are placed in private schools. To address this issue the district has expanded their special needs program with the hiring of an additional special education teacher for the next school year. This will afford more students the opportunity to remain in their home district. In addition, the district will be developing a departmentalized resource center program for the 2004-2005 school year. The school district also reports a drop out rate of 11% for the disabled population ages 16-21 years of age. The child study team however, has continuously engaged both students and their families in counseling and has referred them to community resources in an effort to keep these students in school.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services 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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of in-service training for professional and paraprofessional staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of programs and related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notices, notices of native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings and student participation at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit a review of records and child study team interview indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of planning meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of three year timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that activities have been initiated to bring about compliance in this area.

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 meeting, participants and criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement or disagreement and copy of evaluation reports to parents and adult students ten days prior to meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interview indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, present levels of educational performance, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives and age of majority.

Area(s) of Need:

Goals and Objectives – A review of records indicated that annual goals and objectives are not developed for those areas where a student requires special education.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that a student's Individualized Educational Program includes measurable annual goals and short-term objectives that will enable the student to progress in the general education curriculum. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student is receiving instruction in the core curriculum content standards and that required accommodations and modifications are provided. The plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure implementation of this activity.**

Age of Majority – A review of records indicated that the district ensure that the student and the parent have been informed of the rights that will be transferred to the student on reaching the age of majority.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that beginning at least three years before the student reaches age eighteen, both the parent and the student are informed of the rights that will transfer to the student on reaching the age of majority. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents take the steps necessary to obtain legal guardianship in the event the student is unable to appropriately participate in self-advocacy activities during decision-making processes.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative

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educational setting, and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interview indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interview indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about compliance.

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 Wallkill Regional School District on June 1st, 2nd and 3rd 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 that review the district was able to identify all but a few areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. The district is further 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.

The district indicates that as a Regional High School District, the majority of students in separate setting are inherited from sending districts. In response to these data, the district has expanded their special needs program to allow more students the opportunity to remain in their home district.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents, teachers, administrators and child study team members expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A majority of the parents praised the district for enabling their children to have access to placements in the least restrictive environment. One student in particular, felt that the district made extraordinary adjustments to help accommodate his physical disability. Many parents felt that they were actively involved in the education of their child while others indicated that they were not being heard and therefore their children's need are not being met. Several parents praised the efforts of child study team in preparing their children for transition from high school. However, others expressed frustration over the lack of vocational education, in-class support teachers and programs dealing with behavioral issues. Lastly, some parents felt that their child's transition IEP from elementary to secondary school required improved communication between both teams. Overall, the district's child study team and teachers were viewed as being positive, helpful and encouraging.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services for occupational, physical and speech therapy, length of day and year, facilities and certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find, direct referrals, identifications meetings, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting and participants, criteria, IEP meeting participants, PLEPs goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, notification and participation for out of district nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests survey and assessment, age sixteen needed transition services, student and agency invite, statewide

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assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP graduation requirements, out of district participation, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, consultation time, case management time, student records access and request, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, provision of related services regarding counseling goal and objectives, transfer students, documentation of meetings, student invite to transition meeting, referral process, pre-referral, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants, accept and rejection of reports, three year reevaluation timelines, statement of eligibility for SLD, signatures of agreement and disagreement, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting, IEP goals and objectives for counseling, discipline documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards and written notice of graduation.

The on-site visit, the focus group meeting and additional parent interviews identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards and age of majority.

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