

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Wanaque School District

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: April 22 and 23, 2002

Monitoring Team: Gladys Miller and Zola Mills

Background Information:

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Wanaque School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Wanaque 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 Wanaque 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 Wanaque Elementary School on April 17, 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 its commitment to include all students in general education programs. These efforts include a grant for in-service training for intervention and referral service team training, inclusion classes and problem solving strategies for younger elementary students to enhance their abilities to communicate.

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The district has applied for a Best Practice award for "Leaving a Legacy." This eighth grade program incorporates various activities that promote cooperation and emphasizes themes relating to the students' positive school experience. The district has also applied for a Best Practice award for their "Lift Off For Reading" program that emphasizes student reading successes culminating in a hot air balloon visit to the school.

The district is further commended for other activities including career exploration and experiences, character education and an active parent organization.

Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs 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 year/day and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students and facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of extended school year, facilities, transfer students and related services with regard to frequency, duration and location. However, the district's improvement plan does not address the issue of goals and objectives for related services. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

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

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process/pre-referral intervention, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of need regarding referral process/pre-referral intervention, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines. The plan is insufficient for child find because it lacks procedures to bring about the required changes. The district needs to revise its plan to include these procedures.

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

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding standardized and functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluation, and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

VI. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and participants at reevaluation planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30th. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of statement of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with meetings, participants, criteria and the provision of evaluation reports to parents. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of student files indicated that the district has initiated activities to address these areas of need.

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards (CCCS).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines and teacher access to and knowledge of the IEP. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

IX. LRE

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti factors and considerations and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of use of supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. A review of student records as well as interviews with child study team members indicated that the district has initiated activities to address these areas of need.

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

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X. Preschool Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self- assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding early intervention program to pre-school disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

X. Post School Transition

During self-assessment the district identified concerns regarding student/agency invitations, age fourteen transition services, courses of study, and preferences/interest. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address age fourteen transition service needs. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address student/agency invitations because it lacks an in-service component to ensure compliant 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 monitoring visit.

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans/functional behavioral analysis (BIP/FBA), manifestation determinations and interim alternative educational setting (IAES). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that activities to correct concerns regarding all discipline procedures have been initiated.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern with alternate assessments.

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The district's improvement plan needs to be revised to include adoption of Alternate Proficiency Assessment.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

Though this is a Kindergarten through eighth grade district, during the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with participation in eighth grade graduation exercises. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

XIV. Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of, age range/waivers and group sizes for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size waivers, home instruction approval, team teaching and time for case management responsibilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of class size waivers, home instruction approvals and team teaching. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address case management responsibilities because it lacks procedures and a mechanism to determine the need for additional staff. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 access sheets, maintenance of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding access/requests, destruction of records and the right to appeal/amend records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 Wanaque Borough School District on April 22, 23 and 24, 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 flawless review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify 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 prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of these identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is 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 expressed concerns with the issue of child study team caseloads and the additional responsibilities assigned to them. This concern 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 general provisions, length of school year/day, certifications, holding of meetings, native language, direct referrals (parent/staff), health summary, participants for identification meeting, multi-disciplinary assessments, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, documentation of eligibility, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, preschool transition planning conference, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, access sheets, maintenance of student records and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, provision of related services, transfer students, facilities, surrogate parents, obtaining consent, notices of meetings, written notice, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral processes, summer referrals, timelines for identification meeting, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, early intervention to preschool disabled by age three, age fourteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, student/agency invitation, all discipline procedures, alternate assessment, participation in eighth grade graduation, programs and services class size/waiver, home instruction, team teaching, time for case management, parent/adult student access, destruction of student records and right to amend records.

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The on-site visit did not identify any additional areas of need within the various standards.

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 those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.