

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Washington Borough Public School District **County:** Warren

Monitoring Dates: February 10 & 11, 2003

Monitoring Team: Tracey Pettiford-Bugg, Zola Mills and Janet Wright

Background Information:

During the 2001 – 2002 school year, the Washington Borough Public School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Washington Borough Public 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 Washington Borough Public 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 Memorial School on February 3, 2003. 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, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for their commitment to inclusive education. This commitment is demonstrated through their team teaching models in all grade levels and the Inclusive School workshop that is provided to parents.

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The district is also commended for their award winning butterfly garden at Memorial School. The project is student driven with almost twenty classes, from both district schools, involved in garden activities and a student garden club consisting of forty-five students, including students with disabilities, in grades two through six.

The district also provides programs to enhance peer relationships outside of regular school hours by providing a variety of clubs including trading cards, musicals, gardening, literary magazines and toymakers. Kindness and good citizenship are spotlighted through Basket of Cheer and Random Acts of Kindness Awards.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Reevaluation, Transition, Discipline, 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 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, related services of occupational, physical and speech therapy, length of school day and year, transfer students and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of counseling and the lack of a Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has begun to implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities. During the on-site monitoring the district was unable to provide documentation that a dual use classroom had been approved by the county office. This information has been provided to the county office.

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-referral interventions. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks in-service training and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized and functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Written Reports - During the on-site monitoring, staff interviews and record review indicated that eligibility statements appear in assessment reports. Record review also indicated that although reports are signed they are not dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure individual assessments do not contain eligibility determinations that may only be determined by a duly configured team. The plan must also ensure reports are dated at the time they are developed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with the consistent provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review and ninety-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of present levels of educational performance statements. **The district's improvement**

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plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, considerations, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, continuum and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the Oberti factors.

Area(s) of Need:

Oberti Statements – During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that the district's IEP does not include all four Oberti statements required when considering the least restrictive environment.

- **The district will revise its IEP format to include the four Oberti statements. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Washington Borough School District on February 10 and 11, 2003. 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 acknowledged for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is also commended for the implementation of activities to bring about correction in a number of areas 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit and during parent interviews, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents felt that the district is accommodating and willing to try new programs when these programs are presented to district administrators. Parents expressed a concern with the lack of communication between the two schools regarding the use of technology to individualize student programs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, professional and parent development, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services of occupational, physical and speech therapy, length of day and year, transfer students, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, summer referrals, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, timelines, planning meetings, participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP participants, considerations, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, considerations of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, transition to preschool, procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting list, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes, home instruction consultation time, access and requests for student records, access sheets, maintenance, destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding counseling, pre-referral interventions, copy of evaluation reports to parents and required statements for present levels of educational performance.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, Oberti factors and written reports.

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