

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

District: Washington Township School District

County: Mercer

Monitoring Dates: April 3-4, 2006

Monitoring Team: Jane Marano, Patricia Fair and Caryl Carthew

Background Information:

During the 2004-2005 school year, the Washington 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 Washington Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an onsite monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

During the onsite visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech-language specialists and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

Data Summary:

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicated that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district's classification rate was 13.56% which was below the state classification rate for that year of 14.85%. The district educated 44.3% of students with disabilities (or 137 students out of 309 students), between the ages of 6-21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was above the state average of 42% for that year. During the same year, eight students (of 309) received special education and related services in separate special education private day schools and fourteen students were educated in public separate special education settings. Additionally, 16.7% of preschool students with disabilities (or 8 out of 48 students) were

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educated in general education early childhood settings and 33.3% of preschool students with disabilities (or 16 students) were educated in a special education early childhood setting. Six preschool students with disabilities attended a separate public school special education early childhood program.

Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The onsite monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- General Provisions
- Procedural Safeguards
- Reevaluation
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Programs and Services

Areas Not Reviewed

The following areas were not reviewed by the NJDOE because the district did not serve a population for whom these requirements applied at the time of the monitoring:

- Out of district student participation in graduation
- Written notice of graduation

Areas Demonstrating Compliance

The following areas, within the remaining sections reviewed, were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the NJDOE as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversight of individualized education program ▪ Extended school year ▪ Provision of programs ▪ Transfer procedures
Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referral process ▪ Direct referrals
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standardized assessments ▪ Functional assessment (ESERS) ▪ Bilingual evaluations ▪ Written reports prepared by evaluators
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting participants ▪ Eligibility criteria ▪ Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)

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Section	Areas Demonstrating Compliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copy of evaluation reports to parents
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP meeting participants ▪ Implementation dates ▪ IEP provided to parent prior to implementation ▪ Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP ▪ Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs) ▪ 90-day timelines
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documentation of LRE decisions ▪ Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside the district ▪ Continuum of programs
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs” ▪ Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings ▪ Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP requirements

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Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The table below includes the results of the review of the district’s improvement plan and identifies those areas where correction of noncompliance was verified during the onsite visit. In addition, the table specifies those areas for which improvement activities must be implemented.

Section	Area	Compliance Review/Improvement Activities
FAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of related services – The district does not consider counseling on an individual basis. 	The improvement plan is sufficient
LRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child Find – The district does not implement child find activities for children ages 3-5 residing in the district. ▪ Pre-referral interventions – The district does not establish and monitor timelines for interventions 	<p>The district is directed to develop written procedures for the location and referral of preschool students who may have a disability in accordance with N.J.A.C 6A:14-3.3. The district must conduct training for staff on the procedures and implement an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p> <p>The district must ensure that documentation of the frequency and duration of interventions is maintained in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.3(c). The district must conduct in-service for general and special education staff on procedures and conduct oversight to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale – When a CST member, who evaluated a student as part of an initial evaluation, does not agree with the eligibility decision, a rationale is not provided. 	The improvement plan is sufficient
IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IEP required considerations and components – IEPs for students whose behavior impedes learning do not contain behavioral interventions. ▪ Annual reviews completed by June 30 – The district does not complete annual reviews for students exiting preschool due to scheduling difficulties. 	<p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p> <p>The improvement plan is sufficient.</p>

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Section	Area	Compliance Review/Improvement Activities
LRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs – The district does not consistently consider in-district programs for preschool students with disabilities. 	The improvement plan is sufficient.
Transition to Adult Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of “needed transition services” 	The district is directed to ensure that the IEPs of students age 16 and older, or younger if appropriate, include all required components of the statement of needed transition services. The district must also include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.

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Additional Areas of Need

The following areas were originally identified by the district's self-assessment committee as compliant, but were found to be noncompliant by the NJDOE during the onsite monitoring.

Section	Area	Improvement Activities
LRI	<p>Health summary and vision and hearing screenings – When a referral is made to the child study team, health summary and vision and hearing screenings are not completed prior to the identification meeting.</p> <p>Identification meeting timelines for preschool children – All referral requests for initial evaluations for preschool children residing in Washington Township are made through Project Child Assessment Service/Mercer County Special Services School District. When parents request an evaluation through the district, parents are directed to Project CHILD and parents are mailed a packet of information that must be completed and returned to Project Child before the identification meeting is scheduled. As a result, identification meetings are not consistently conducted within 20 days of the request for an evaluation.</p> <p>Identification meeting participants - For preschool children, the general education teacher at the meeting is not the child's teacher and is not knowledgeable about the district's programs. The teacher was employed by Mercer County Special Services School District.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that when a referral is made to the child study team (preschool age children and school age students), a health summary and vision and hearing screenings are completed prior to the identification meeting and results are forwarded to the child study team. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p> <p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that when parents make written requests for an initial evaluation, the 20 day timeline is maintained from the date of the district's receipt of written request from the parent. The district must revise its procedures to ensure that the identification meeting is conducted in a timely manner. Activities also must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p> <p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that all required participants attend identification meetings. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>

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Section	Area	Improvement Activities
	<p>Identification meeting participants - When the suspected disability is a language disorder, for students ages 6 through 21, the speech-language specialist does not consistently attend identification meetings.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that all required participants attend identification meetings. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>
Evaluation	<p>Educational impact statement (ESLS) – Speech and language evaluation reports do not include a statement of educational impact of the communication pattern on the student’s performance in the classroom.</p> <p>Functional assessments (ESLS) – Evaluations do not consistently include an observation, parent interview, interview with teacher(s) referring the potentially disabled student, review of the student’s developmental/educational history and review of interventions documented by the classroom teacher(s) and others who work with the student.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that the speech-language specialist obtains the written educational impact statement from the classroom teacher and includes the statement in the evaluation report. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p> <p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that initial evaluation reports for students referred to the speech-language specialist include all components of a functional assessment. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>
IEP	<p>IEP required considerations and components – Speech-language IEPs do not document the frequency and duration of services.</p>	<p>The district is directed to implement improvement activities to ensure that each IEP for a student receiving speech and language services identifies the frequency and duration of speech and language services. Activities must include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure correction and ongoing compliance.</p>

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Summary

Onsite special education monitoring was conducted of the Washington Township School District on April 3 and 4, 2006. 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 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 will correct non-compliance.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicated that during the 2005-2006 school year, the district's classification rate was 13.56% which was below the state classification rate for that year of 14.85%. The district educated 44.3% of students with disabilities (or 137 students out of 309 students), between the ages of 6-21, in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This was above the state average of 42% for that year. During the same year, eight students (of 309) received special education and related services in separate special education private day schools and fourteen students were educated in public separate special education settings. Additionally, 16.7% of preschool students with disabilities (or 8 out of 48 students) were educated in general education early childhood settings and 33.3% of preschool students with disabilities (or 16 students) were educated in a special education early childhood setting. Six preschool students with disabilities attended a separate public school special education early childhood program.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and staff. Most parents indicated that case managers and teachers were easily accessible and communicate regularly with them.

Sections identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included:

- General Provisions
- Procedural Safeguards
- Reevaluation
- Transition to Preschool
- Discipline
- Statewide Assessment
- Programs and Services

Areas within the remaining sections that were identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the onsite monitoring visit included:

- Oversight of individualized education program
- Extended school year
- Provision of programs
- Transfer procedures
- Referral process
- Direct referrals
- Standardized assessments
- Functional assessment (ESERS)
- Bilingual evaluations
- Written reports prepared by evaluators
- Eligibility meeting participants
- Eligibility criteria
- Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)
- IEP meeting participants
- Implementation dates
- Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and/or revise the IEP
- Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge of and/or access to IEPs)

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- 90-day timelines
- Documentation of LRE decisions
- Notification of and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside the district
- Continuum of options
- Beginning at age 14, IEP statement of “transition service needs”
- Student and agency invitation to IEP meetings
- Activities, annual goals and benchmarks related to the student’s desired outcomes
- IEP graduation requirements

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding:

- Provision of related services – counseling
- Child Find
- Pre-referral interventions
- Signature of eligibility agreement and/or disagreement and rationale
- IEP required considerations and components – behavior intervention plans
- Annual reviews completed by June 30 of each student’s last year in preschool
- Opportunity for all students with disabilities to access all general education programs
- Placement decisions based on students’ individual needs
- Beginning at age 16, IEP statement of “needed transition services”
- Identification of post-secondary liaison

The onsite monitoring visit identified areas of need within the various standards regarding:

- Health summary and vision and hearing screenings
- Identification meeting timelines for preschool students
- Identification meeting participants
- Educational impact statement (ESLS)
- Functional assessments (ESLS)
- IEP required considerations and components – frequency and duration for speech-language services

The improvement plan submitted to the OSEP has been reviewed and approved. The district is expected to implement the improvement activities described in the monitoring report to achieve compliance in all of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment and areas of need identified during the onsite visit, within six months of the date of this report. Verification of compliance will be conducted by the County Office of Education and a monitor from the NJDOE.