

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

District: Washington Township School District

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: October 8 and 9, 2003

Monitoring Team: Zola Mills, Gladys Miller

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 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 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 Township 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 Brass Castle School on September 23, 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 therapists and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The district is commended for the buddy program where older students interact with the pre-school disabled and the kindergarten students.

The district is also commended for enriching their curriculum with a wide selection of programs such as Project Read, DARE, CAP and the fourth through sixth grade

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Accelerated Reading Program. All teachers at the first grade level have been trained in Project Read; summer training in this program was offered to all teachers. The district is committed to enlarging the scope of this training to other grade levels. The district feels this program is having a positive effect in keeping students in general education classes with successful academic results.

An additional program entitled "Publishing Company," started with a New Jersey Education Association Pride in Education Grant that has been renewed annually. This program utilizes both senior citizen volunteers and a part time paid program aide to make covers for student work, bind student special projects and journals into book form, and to make journals for the kindergarten.

Additionally the district is commended for the full day kindergarten for at-risk students.

Data Summary:

The district is commended for its successful efforts in educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The district has established a team teaching model at a number of grade levels to keep special education students in the general education classrooms. Based on a review of district data, it was identified that approximately 71% of their special needs students are educated with their non-disabled peers more than 80% of the school day. The district classification rate of 18% is higher than the state average of 13.4%, however, the district is confident that the Project Read use and training will bring that figure near the state average.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Transition to Pre-school and Discipline were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified 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, length of day and year facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, although no compliance issues were identified, the district expressed a need for more accurate documentation of transfer students' records. The district has developed and implemented a form to strengthen this area.

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

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Section III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of selection of surrogate parents and documentation of multiple attempts to contact parents for scheduled meetings. The district has developed a surrogate parent procedure and a form to document attempts to contact parents.

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 referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern in the area of Child Find. The district's plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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 and standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of acceptance or rejection of outside reports with an opportunity to provide a rationale if rejected in whole or in part. The district's plan is sufficient to address this need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding preschool evaluations.

Area(s) of Need:

Preschool Evaluations – During the on-site monitoring, record review and staff interviews indicated preschool evaluations did not include the required components. The preschool evaluations consisted of only one child study team evaluation and a

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speech evaluation. Because the speech evaluation is not one of the two required CST assessments, another assessment must be conducted.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure preschool evaluations contain at least two child study team assessments. The implementation of these activities will ensure that preschool students are evaluated in all areas of suspected disabilities and ensure that they receive services necessary to allow them to derive educational benefit from their program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and participants and turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with the lack of space to enumerate the participants on the invitation to the planning meeting. The district has developed and implemented a form to bring this area into compliance.

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 meetings and participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, signature of agreement or disagreement and provision of a copy of evaluation reports to the parents of students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timely provision of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for speech and language services and documentation of referrals from speech language therapist where another area of disability is suspected. 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.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and participants for students in grades kindergarten through sixth, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, and teacher access and knowledge.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of the revised IEP to parents prior to implementation of a revised IEP, inclusion of a rationale for IEP revision in the present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, and provision of related services by the first full week of school. 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.

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services and nonacademic and extracurricular notification and participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum for preschool students and regular education access for preschool students. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School is not applicable in this K to 6th district

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff knowledge of statewide and district wide assessment measures. 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.

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements are not applicable in this K to 6th district

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Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of sufficient time for school psychologist to provide case management and counseling services, sufficient teaching staff and paraprofessional staff to maintain compliant class sizes and provision of consultation time for resource teachers. 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.

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access and requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of other locations of student records. The district has instituted activities that have corrected this area 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 Washington Township School District on October 8 and 9, 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 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 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 and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. Concerns were expressed by several parents regarding low expectations held for special education students, the lack of implementation of individual IEP goals and objectives and communication between parents and child study team members. One parent expressed a desire to have more than one child study team member present at IEP meetings.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included all General Provisions, extended school year, related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants for students kindergarten through sixth grade, reevaluations completed by June 30th of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement and rationale, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, consideration and documentation, supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, pre-school transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need including surrogate parents, documentation of multiple attempts to gain parent participation in

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meetings, Child Find, acceptance or rejection of reports, general education teacher participation at age five reevaluation meetings, IEP meeting participants, timely provision of evaluation reports to parents, provision of revised IEP to parent before implementation, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, provision of related services in the first full week of school, continuum and regular education access for preschool disabled students, staff knowledge of statewide assessment measures, insufficient child study team and staff, consultation time, insufficient case management time and documentation of other locations.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding preschool evaluations.

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