

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

District: Weehawken Township School District

County: Hudson

Monitoring Dates: October 22, 23, 24, 2001

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright, Zola Mills, Thomas Walsh and Gary Molenaar

Background Information:

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Weehawken 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 Weehawken 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 Weehawken 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, 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 New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at Weehawken High School on October 15, 2001. 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.

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

District Strengths:

The district is commended for its efforts to ensure full participation of all in-district students in school-based extracurricular and non-academic activities. These activities include team sports, the Kid Witness Television Series, the high school morning news program, and Saturday and after-school programs for additional instruction. The district also offers a weekly cultural arts program at the fifth and sixth grade levels in lieu of physical education. This program allows students to participate in dance activities that revolve around specific themes. This leads to a culminating activity at the end of the year for parents and community members.

The district's exceptional commitment to inclusion of special education students is seen throughout the district. This commitment is further evidenced by faculty/staff collaboration at monthly luncheon meetings at the high school and the provision of innovative special education primer. This collegial spirit is apparent at all levels in the district.

The district also developed a primer that was compiled by the director of special education for district staff. This primer contains district special education policies and procedures and serves as a guide to staff and administrators to improve services to special education students.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Evaluation and Program and Services 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.

II. F.A.P.E.

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, transportation, occupational and physical therapy, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provisions of counseling and speech therapy and with facilities issues. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns with the decision-making process for extended school year and procedures regarding transfer students. The plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks staff development and an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.

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

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

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, obtaining consent and providing independent evaluations when requested.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of notices of meetings and translators. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns in the areas of the provision of PRISE with notice of a meeting, and the provision of written notice within 20-days in response to parental requests. No improvement plan was submitted to address these issues. The district also identified concerns in the areas of provision of written notice in the native language and participation of teachers at initial IEP meetings in the summer. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

Areas of Need:

PRISE – The district's self-assessment indicated that PRISE is not included when it provides notices of a meeting to parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that PRISE is included whenever it provides notice of a meeting.**

Written Notice – The district's self-assessment indicated it does not respond to parental requests in the form of written notice when they are required to do so.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it provides written notice in response to parental requests when that response needs to be in the form of written notice.**

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with child find activities, direct referrals, summer referrals, health summary and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the referral process. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks staff development and an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include these components to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.

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

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

V. Reevaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with reevaluation planning meetings, participants at these meetings, and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During self-assessment, the district identified an area of need regarding meeting reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks staff development and an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include these components to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.

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

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding eligibility meetings and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the participation of a regular education teacher at meetings and specific criteria for determining eligibility. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks appropriate procedures, staff development activities and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents.

Areas of Need:

Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents – Though staff indicated that copies of evaluation reports are given to parents, documentation of this provision is not maintained in student files.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it maintains documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents.**

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

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with implementation dates, annual reviews, ninety-day timelines, and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need to align goals and objectives with the core curriculum content standards, participants at the IEP meeting, considerations and required statements, and teacher access and knowledge of IEPs. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure full 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

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access and continuum of program options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding student participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities for those students placed in out-of-district programs. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the individual decision-making process.

Areas of Need:

Nonacademic and extracurricular participation – The district identified that out-of-district students are not informed of nonacademic and extracurricular activities available within the district. The improvement plan limits itself to having the athletic director inform out-of-district students of athletic programs they may participate in.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure out-of-district students are informed of all nonacademic and extracurricular activities that are available in the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

Documentation of the Individualized Decision-Making Process – During the on-site visit it was determined that though IEP team members are following an appropriate process to determine placements, this process is not clearly documented in the IEP. Though IEPs indicate the benefits of the special education program, they do not include the supplementary aids and services that were considered and why those aids and services were not appropriate to meet the needs of the student in the general education program. Additionally, IEPs do not document the benefits of the general education class,

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

nor the potentially harmful or beneficial effects a placement may have on the student with disabilities or the other students in the class.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs document the individualized decision-making process, including Oberti factors and factors related to the consideration of supplementary aids and services. The plan must include staff development and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.**

IX. Transition

Preschool Transition

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding evaluation and placement in program by the third birthday.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding attendance at preschool transition planning conference.

Areas of Need:

Preschool Transition Planning Conference – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined the district does not consistently attend the preschool transition planning conference because personnel from EIP programs are not inviting them.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district participates in preschool transition planning conferences.**

Post-School Transition

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment, the district identified themselves compliant in the area of listing of courses for students age 14 and older.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding documentation of age 14 transition service needs, documentation of preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, student and agency invitation and agency involvement. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include this component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures.

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

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

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of maintaining the same disciplinary standards for students, unless identified in the IEP, disciplinary procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans and functional behavior assessments, interim alternative educational settings, and manifestation determination meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding notification of suspensions to case managers. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include that component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.

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

XII. Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with alternate assessments and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding participation in statewide assessment and the use of approved accommodations and modifications. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in IEP requirements, issuing of diplomas, and participation in graduation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of written notice of graduation.

Areas of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interview that the district does not provide written notice of graduation to parents or adult students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that written notice of graduation is provided to parents and adult students prior**

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

to graduation. The district is advised to adopt the model notice forms developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding documentation of access to student records, access sheets, procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records, and documentation of other locations of student files.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding staff knowledge of student record procedures. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks a staff development component. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Weehawken Township School District on October 22, 23, and 24, 2001. 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 thorough and 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 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. Additionally, the district is commended for its commitment to inclusive practices on a district-wide basis.

At a focus group meeting held on October 15, 2001, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting 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 the evaluation process, general provisions, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, obtaining consent, independent evaluations, child find activities, direct referrals, inclusion of health summary and vision and hearing screenings, timelines for identification meetings, eligibility meetings, documentation of eligibility, the age of majority, annual review timelines, continuum, discipline standards, documentation of statewide assessment, alternate assessment, participating in graduation activities, programs and services, and access sheets, and access to and procedures for the maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the provision of speech and counseling services, transfer students, extended school year, referral processes, notices of meetings, native language, distribution of PRISE, reevaluation timelines, eligibility participation and criteria, IEP participants, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, nonacademic and extracurricular participation of out of district students, post school transition, and documentation of suspensions to case managers, criteria for participation in statewide assessment, use of approved accommodations and modifications and staff knowledge of student records procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding copies of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of the individualized decision-making process, Oberti factors, supplementary aids and services, attendance at preschool transition planning conferences and provision of written notice of graduation.

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 the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.