

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

District: West Essex Regional School District

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: October 7, 2003

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Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **West Essex Regional School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **West Essex Regional 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 **West Essex Regional 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 **West Essex Regional School District** 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 adopting the **Kurzweil 3000 Education “Reading” Software**, a program designed to assist students with reading and writing difficulties. The Kurzweil software has been installed on the district's network site and can be accessed from all classrooms.

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Students have been provided with home copies of the software. Students' language arts reading, writing and communication skills have been further developed with the aid of this software. Students are demonstrating greater performance skills in textbook reading, note taking, test taking and development of study guides. District data indicated an increase in the number of students who have scored in the proficient range in Language Arts Literacy on the HSPA.

Additionally, the West Essex Regional High School is commended for developing a **Mentoring Program** in which regular education students and students from the cognitively impaired program are paired in computer classes. This pairing allows disabled students to access general education courses. Together, students work to complete class projects and assignments.

Data Summary:

The district is increasingly making strides in increasing the number of students in general education classes for more than 80% of the day with appropriate supplementary aids and services.

During the 2001-2002 school year, slightly more than 53% of students with disabilities who took the Language Arts Literacy High School Proficiency Assessment scored in the proficient range.

Data indicate that 96% of the district's students with disabilities who graduated in June 2002 are either employed or attending a post-secondary education program.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Procedural Safeguards, Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Graduation 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies/procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training. The inclusion of this component will allow the district to determine whether staff members are utilizing the information that is being provided to them and whether students are benefiting from the provision of these training sessions. The district will revise the improvement plan to include this element.**

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

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Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs, related services goals and objectives, transfer students, facilities and certification of staff.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the provision of related services, identification of frequency and duration of related services, length of school day, extended school year and monitoring of out-of-district students' placement and services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding child find activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation timelines for students eligible for speech/language services and reevaluation planning meetings and participants for students eligible for speech and language services and students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding reevaluation timelines for students eligible for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and signatures of agreement/disagreement with rationale.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 IEP meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, provision of IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines and teacher access and responsibility for implementing IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding vocational school personnel participation in IEP decisions and the lack of on-going communication with parents of students in out-of-district placements throughout the year. 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 X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding student and agency invitations to transition planning meetings, transition service needs, needed transition services and assessing preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of monitoring transition services provided by outside agencies. Additionally, although the district invites outside agencies, they identified a concern because staff have not made adequate attempts to obtain agency participation in transition planning meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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Section X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

This section is not applicable as this is a regional high school which provides services to students in grades 9 through 12.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards for the potentially disabled student.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notification of student removals to the case manager, short term removals and transmittal of records to the appropriate authorities when crimes are committed. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding students in state facilities, school personnel in numbers sufficient to ensure the provision of required programs and services and case management responsibilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 student records access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of records in other locations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding parents, adult students and staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 **West Essex Regional School District** on October 7, 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 that review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. 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.

In September, a focus group meeting was held at the West Essex Regional School District. The meeting was attended by six parents, two board members, child study team members, the special education director and a local newspaper reporter. Parents expressed satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and indicated that they are pleased with the services and quality of education. Many favorable comments were also made concerning child study team members, particularly at the middle school, because they provide a great deal of support to families. Parents feel accepted as members of the IEP team and believe they are a part of the decision-making process. Additionally, it was indicated by many of the seventh grade parents that the district offers excellent administrative support for students transitioning into seventh grade from their sending districts. Parents commented that the West Essex Regional School District is very focused on the individual student's success, personal goals and outcomes. Some parents expressed concerns regarding insufficient staff at the high school. It was stated that there appears to be a lack of administrative support and organization at the high school. Some parents believe the high school is too departmentalized and regimented as compared to the organizational structure and guidance provided to families at the middle school.

A review of the data indicated that West Essex Regional School District has increased the percentage of students in general education programs for more than 80% of the day consistently over the last three years. The data further indicates that a high percentage of graduates with disabilities either enter the world of work or enroll in a higher education program. In 2001-2002, more than 53% of students with disabilities who took the high school proficiency assessment scored in the proficient range.

Procedural Safeguards, Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures, Least Restrictive Environment, Statewide Assessment and Graduation were standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of programs, related services goals/objectives, transfer students, facilities, certification of staff, referral process/pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary information, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines/participants, reevaluation meetings/timelines/participants for students eligible for speech/language services, reevaluation planning meetings/participants for students eligible for special education/related services, eligibility meeting/participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, signatures of agreement/disagreement with rationale, IEP meeting/participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals/objective aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates,

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annual review timelines, provision of IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility for implementing IEPs, student/agency invitation, transition service needs, needed transition services, preferences/interests, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting list/45-day return, procedural safeguards for the potentially disabled student, class size, age range, speech group sizes, home instruction, consultation time for teachers, student records access/requests, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of student records and documentation of records in other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, provision of related services, identification of frequency/duration of related services, length of school day, extended school year, monitoring of out-of-district students' placement and services, child find, reevaluation timelines for students eligible for special education/related services, evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility conference, vocational school personnel participation in IEP decisions, lack of on-going communication with parents of students in out-of- district placements, monitoring of services provided by outside agencies, steps to obtain agency participation in transition planning, written notification of student removals to the case manager, transmittal of records to the appropriate authorities when crimes are committed, short term removals, students in state facilities, school personnel in numbers sufficient to ensure the provision of required programs/services and case management responsibilities, parents/adult students and staff knowledge of student record policies and procedures.

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

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the **West Essex Regional School District** will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the one area of the improvement plan that requires revision.