

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

District: West New York

County: Hudson

Monitoring Dates: February 26 – March 2, 2001

Monitoring Team: Donna Bogart, Stephanie DeBruyne, Karen Ellmore, Joshua Gillenson

Background Information

During the 1999-2000 school year, the West New York School District conducted a self-assessment to determine if the district's practices regarding the provision of special education programs and services meet federal and state requirements. A steering committee comprised of educators and parents was established to review all information collected in order to evaluate it for the purpose of completing the district's self-assessment.

Parents and staff were invited to attend a public focus group meeting as the first step in the self-assessment process. Information was collected from additional sources within the district. Based on the information collected by the district, a self-assessment report was developed citing strengths and areas of need. The district has developed activities for compliance and/or improvement in the areas of need identified in their report.

A second public focus group meeting was held in the district on February 8, 2001 prior to the monitoring visit. The monitoring team from the New Jersey State Department of Education facilitated this focus group, which included parents and district representatives. At this meeting, parents reported that they were pleased with the district's provision of special education programs and services but had several concerns.

District Strengths

The Director of Special Services hired a Transition Specialist 2 years ago who has a strong background in post-secondary transition services. This individual has taken an active role in the IEP process of post-secondary transition planning for students in the district.

Special education teachers in School #2 began a community service project with their students. The project leaders taught classified students how to crochet and then donated those crocheted hats to children undergoing chemotherapy at a New York City cancer center. The students have now adopted Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York

City and have delivered the hats on a regular basis. As a result of this project, other students in the school have asked to learn how to crochet and are being taught by this initial group of classified students.

The district assigned full time guidance counselors to each elementary school to provide much needed counseling services and to be a part of the SSST/PAC team process.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified various areas of need regarding staff development. The improvement plan activities are sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding policies and procedures for the provision of hearing aides and other assistive hearing devices. The district's improvement plan will not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The plan needs to be revised to include that component to ensure staff are implementing these procedures in an appropriate and consistent manner.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, provision of counseling services, transfer students, and facilities.

Area of Need:

Extended school year – During the on-site visit, an area of need was identified regarding the provision of extended school year services. Though interviews with staff indicated that extended school year services are routinely discussed during IEP meetings and annual reviews, only one class, at School # 2, is available to provide extended school year services. Staff reported that as a result of this limited availability, only a few students receive the services even though others need them.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that ESY is provided to all students who require those services. The plan must include a component to ensure district needs are assessed and additional program options are provided should the need exist.**

Provision of Counseling services – During the on-site, interviews with staff at the high school indicated that all IEP mandated counseling services had been provided by the high school child study team psychologist. However, because the high school has been without this team member, counseling services have not been provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure the provision of counseling services as required by IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent provision of these services. Additionally, the plan must identify how the district will provide compensatory services to those students who have not received counseling during the 2000-01 school year.**

Transfer students – During the on-site a review of student records coupled with staff interviews indicated that there is a lack of consistency in implementing procedures for the provision of programs and services for transfer students. Parents also reported significant delays on the part of district staff in obtaining necessary information from sending school districts.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the timely provision of programs and services to students when they transfer into the district. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the appropriate and consistent implementation of these procedures.**

Facilities – During the on-site, school visits identified an area of need related to appropriate instructional space for related services. Specifically, speech therapists were conducting simultaneous sessions in shared spaces at schools 1,2,3,4,5, and the high school. Similarly, resource room teachers are sharing similar spaces in schools 1,2,3,4, and 5. The County Office has been notified of these issues.

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding required participants at meetings and communicating to parents in languages other than English. Improvement plan activities are sufficient to address these areas of need.

The district also identified an area of need regarding surrogate parents. The improvement plan does not sufficiently address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site regarding notification of the transfer of rights upon reaching the age of majority.

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that while there are policies and procedures for appointing a surrogate parent, the district has not identified any training activities for the individuals who will be serving as surrogate parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include training activities for individuals who will be serving as surrogate parents.**

Age of Majority – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through a review of IEPs and interviews with district staff that parents and students were being informed that the transfer of rights would occur upon the student reaching the age of majority. The district has been informing parents and students of this transfer one-year before the student turns eighteen instead of three years before.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that students and parents are notified regarding transfer of rights at least three years before the student reaches the age of majority.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment the district determined that the referral process and summer timelines were areas of need. The improvement plan sufficiently addresses these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at identification meetings for preschool students, and the provision of interventions in general education.

Area of Need:

Participants at Identification Meetings – During the on-site, a review of records as well interviews with staff indicated that the full child study team has not been participating in identification meetings for preschool disabled students. While the meetings consistently include the social worker, the psychologist, and the speech language specialist, the learning consultant has not been in attendance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure all members of the child study team participate in identification meetings for preschool aged students.**

Interventions in General Education – During the on-site visit, interviews with district staff and parents indicated that interventions in general education were insufficient to address needs of students. They indicated that interventions in general education are not sufficiently explored, nor effective, including those initiated through the SSST(PAC) process. As a result, staff indicated that there are high numbers of referrals made to the child study team, especially in May and June of every school year. A record review further indicated the district does not document the interventions or the effectiveness of the interventions implemented in the general education setting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure it documents interventions it has implemented in the general education setting as well as the effectiveness of those interventions.**

Section V: Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

The district self-assessment report identified that the reports written by the speech language specialist for students who are eligible for speech language services do not consistently contain all of the required components of a functional assessment. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of outside assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Bilingual Evaluations – During the on-site, the files of bilingual students were reviewed. It was determined those reports did not indicate whether the clinician was bilingual or whether a translator was used.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that when a student is assessed in a language other than English, the record will indicate whether the clinician was bilingual or whether a translator was used.**

Acceptance/Rejection of outside assessments – During the on-site, interviews and record review indicated teams were not following either a consistent or an appropriate procedure for accepting or rejecting assessment reports from outside agencies.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure teams are implementing an appropriate procedure to accept or reject reports from outside agencies. The plan must include an administrative oversight**

component to ensure these procedures are being implemented in a consistent manner.

Section VI: Reevaluation

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding reevaluation timelines. The improvement plan sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

The district's self-assessment identified an area of need regarding participation by regular education teachers at both ESERS and ESLS meetings. The improvement plan indicated that this area of need was rectified as of April 2000. The monitors confirmed this during the on-site visit.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of provision of reports to parents - During the on-site, interviews with staff indicated that reports are given to parents at eligibility meetings. However, a review of student files indicated the district does not maintain documentation of this provision.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Educational Programs

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the development of goals and objectives for occupational and physical therapy, the involvement of secondary school staff at IEP meetings for students transitioning out of elementary schools, and the development of behavioral intervention plans. Improvement plan activities sufficiently address these areas of need.

The district further identified that teacher access to IEPs was an area of need. However, improvement plan activities will not sufficiently address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives.

Areas of Need:

Teacher access to IEPs – During the self-assessment process, the district identified that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of their students’ educational needs because IEPs of students who were new to the school were not available to teachers at the start of the school year.

Interviews with teachers throughout the district indicated that though most of the elementary teachers reviewed IEPs and signed off on a sheet that they had done so, staff at the high school rarely reviewed IEPs for their students. Parents interviews indicated high school teachers were less knowledgeable about their children’s educational needs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure teachers have access to IEPs and are aware of the contents of those documents. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of these procedures on a district-wide basis.**

Goals and objectives linked to the core curriculum – During the on-site, a review of IEPs determined that goals and objectives were an exact reiteration of the core curriculum content standards and indicators. None of these standards or indicators were individualized to identify how they would be modified to allow the student to access the general education curriculum.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs reflect individualized goals and objectives that identify how the student will access the general education curriculum. It is recommended the district participate in trainings provided by the LRCs regarding the development of these goals and objectives.**

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need related to the continuum of services that are available for students with disabilities. This issue was also identified and discussed in the self-assessment section devoted to General Provisions. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

The district also identified (in the section dedicated to Programs and Services) an area of need related to supplementary aids and services. However, the improvement plan is not sufficient to address this area of need.

During the on-site visit, additional areas of need were identified regarding regular education access, individualized decision-making, and nonacademic and extracurricular participation by out-of-district students.

Areas of Need:

Provision of supplementary aids and services to support students in regular education – During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need to increase options to support students with disabilities and teachers in the general education curriculum. The improvement plan limits itself to activities to facilitate teacher effectiveness through behavior management without addressing academic supports for students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include strategies and techniques that will address the academic needs of the students in general education settings. The plan must include staff development and a component to ensure the effectiveness of that training.**

Access to regular education programs – During the on-site, a review of data and interviews with district staff indicated that access to regular education programs by students with disabilities varies throughout the district. . Staff reported that in Schools #1, 2 and 6 there is very limited access to regular education programs for classified students because these students are not scheduled to have any activities or classes with their nondisabled peers.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that students with disabilities have opportunities for access to regular education programs and to participate in activities with their nondisabled peers as determined appropriate by the IEP team.**

Individualized decision-making regarding placement of students – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff indicated that in many cases, the decision-making process is impacted by the existing program options in the district. Staff also reported that during the latter portion of the school year, placement decisions are based solely on openings in existing classes.

Though the district has made a concerted effort to decrease the number of students placed in out-of-district programs over the past year, parents and staff reported that in-district services are not sufficient to address the needs of these students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that placement decisions are based on individual student needs. The plan must include a needs assessment to ensure the district has the ability to identify additional programming options that may be required to maintain students in-district and the manner in which it will develop and provide these programs.**

Nonacademic and extracurricular participation – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff indicated a lack of formalized procedures to inform students in out-of-district placements about extracurricular and nonacademic opportunities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that out-of-district students are informed of nonacademic and extracurricular activities and are afforded the opportunity to participate in those activities with their nondisabled peers as determined appropriate by the IEP team.**

Section X: Transition

A. Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding participation of child study teams in the preschool transition planning conference. Improvement plan activities sufficiently address this area of need.

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

B. Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP documentation of Transition Service Needs and Needed Transition Services; documenting student interests and preferences; developing linkages with agencies involved in providing transition services; notice requirements; and invitations to students and agencies to attend IEP meetings. Improvement plan activities sufficiently address these areas of need.

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

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the development of discipline procedures; completion of functional behavioral assessments

and the inclusion of behavioral intervention plans in IEPs; documentation of suspensions to case managers; convening manifestation determination meetings on a consistent basis; and the development of interim alternative education settings. Improvement plan activities sufficiently address these areas of need.

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

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding compensatory classes for students who failed the HSPT exam, and the need for guidance counselors to facilitate student placement in such classes. The district improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of participation in statewide assessments in IEPs and alternate assessments.

Areas of Need:

Documentation in IEPs – During the on-site, a review of student records indicated that IEPs did not include information regarding student participation in either statewide or alternate assessments, and/or the identification of required accommodations and modifications. This issue was particularly evidenced in IEPs for students placed in self-contained classes. Parents reported that students do not receive accommodations or modifications during testing situations because the information is not included in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that IEPs identify whether the student will participate in statewide assessments or the alternate assessment. The plan must include a mechanism to include necessary accommodations/modifications and to ensure staff are aware of and provide these required modifications or accommodations.**

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

Summary of Findings:

The district self-assessment did not identify any areas of need related to Graduation Requirements. However, during the on-site visit, record reviews and interviews with the director and transition specialist indicated that written notice of graduation has not been provided to date. They reported that this had recently been identified as an area of need and that the district will be using the state model notice form. This activity will sufficiently address this area of need.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district identified a need to provide additional time for consultation between resource room teachers and general education faculty. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district did not identify any areas of need regarding Student Records. However, an area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of location of student records.

Areas of Need:

Documentation of Location of Student Records – During the on-site visit, a review of central files indicated they do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district. A review of the special education student records within the Department of Special Services indicated that all of these files contained a “Notice of Pupil Record Location” that identified other locations where pupil records were maintained.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that the “Notice of Pupil Record Location” currently used in special education student records is relocated to the central file.**

Summary

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the West New York School District from February 26 – March 2, 2001. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. As a result of the thorough and comprehensive review conducted by the district during the self-assessment process, the district was able to self-identify a number of areas that require improvement as well as develop an improvement plan that with some revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, 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.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development; policies and procedures; participants at meetings; communicating with parents whose native language is not English; surrogate parents; documentation of pre-referral intervention strategies; timelines for reevaluations; IEP goals and objectives for related services; lack of a continuum of program options; participation in transition planning conferences for incoming 3 year old students; discipline issues; documentation of post-secondary transition activities; access to IEPs by teachers; and consultation time for resource program teachers and regular education teachers.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding procedures for notifying parents of out-of-district students regarding extracurricular activities; transfer student procedures; transfer of rights; extended school year; provision of counseling services; bilingual evaluations; acceptance or rejection of outside reports; modifications and accommodations and participation in statewide assessments; provision of written notice of graduation; provision of evaluation reports to parents; access to regular education programs; development of appropriate goals and objectives; and documentation of the location of pupil records.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to revise its improvement plan to address the additional areas of need and to resubmit the plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.