

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: West Paterson Public Schools

County: Passaic

Monitoring Dates: January 7, 8, 9, 2002

Monitoring Team: Janet Wright, Damen Cooper, Tom Walsh and Theresa Schiffenhaus

Background Information:

During the 2000–2001 school year, the West Paterson 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 Paterson Public Schools 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 Paterson School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs 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 NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on December 12, 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.

District Strengths:

The district should be commended for a variety of community-based organizations. These programs include Berkley College, which provides assistance through the provision of staff training and corporate adoption by the Nestle Corporation. The district should also be commended for the development of activities that support a collegial environment among staff.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Reevaluation and Statewide Assessment 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.

I. General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional/parent development. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified that parents were unaware of the accommodations/modifications that regular education teachers must provide for classified students. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

No additional areas of need were identified 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 related services, length of school day/year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of extended school year. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns in the area of transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service 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 visit.

III. Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, native language, and independent evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district has developed an improvement that is sufficient to address the area of surrogate parents. The district further identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings, written notice, and meetings for students eligible for speech and language services. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address these areas of need. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

IV. Location, Referral, Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the referral process, direct referrals (parent/staff), summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of health summaries for preschool students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find.

Areas of Need:

Child Find – During the on-site visit, it was determined that although the district has Child Find activities for students through age five, they do not include students through the age of twenty-one.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure Child Find activities include students between the ages of three and twenty-one, including those students who are migrant or homeless. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the required procedures.**

V. Evaluation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education and related services and functional assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/ rejection of reports.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services and written reports.

Areas of Need:

Multi-disciplinary Evaluations – During the on-site, record review indicated that speech and language evaluations do not include a statement by the teacher of the educational impact of the speech problem.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech/language evaluations contain a statement by the teacher regarding the educational impact of the speech problem. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessment – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that speech and language evaluations do not include the required components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech/language evaluations include all required components for functional assessments. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that individual speech assessment reports included statements regarding issues that may only be determined by the members of the IEP team and not by individual evaluators. This information included eligibility determinations and specific therapy recommendations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure individual reports do not contain statements or determinations that may only be made by a duly configured IEP team. The plan must include staff development and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

VII. Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at the eligibility meetings and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding eligibility meetings for students determined eligible for speech and language services. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this issue. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district further identified concerns regarding

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provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents and progress reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility criteria.

Area of Need:

Criteria – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that there was a lack of documentation indicating the criteria used to determine continuing eligibility for specific learning disability (SLD) classifications.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that continued eligibility under the specific learning disability criteria is documented and based on the criteria established in N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5.**

VIII. IEP

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, considerations/required statements, implementation dates, 90-day timelines and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of annual review timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the area of annual review timelines. The district further identified concerns in the area of alignment of goals & objectives to the core curriculum content standards (CCCS). The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district needs to revise its improvement plan to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants and considerations/required statements for students determined eligible for speech and language services.

Areas of Need:

Participants - During the on-site visit, record review indicated an inconsistency in teacher attendance at annual review meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure teacher participation at annual review meetings for students determined eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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Considerations/Required Statements – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that considerations and/or required statements were not consistently included in the district's IEP's for students determined eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure required consideration and statements are included in the IEPs for students determined eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

IX. Least Restrictive Environment

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding Oberti factors, considerations and statements, regular education access and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of supplemental aids and services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of nonacademic/extracurricular participation for out-of-district students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding individual decision-making.

Area of Need:

Individual Decision Making - During the on-site visit, staff and parent interviews indicated that the district does not base placement decisions on the individual needs of students. Instead placement decisions are based on the availability of programs within the students' home schools.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure placement decisions are based on the individual needs of the student and not on the availability of programs in the school. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

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X. Transition

Transition to Post School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student/agency invitations and age fourteen transition service needs statement.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study and preferences/interests.

Areas of need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site visit, record review indicated the district is not including courses of study in IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure courses of study are included in IEPs for students by age fourteen. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

Preferences/Interests – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that information regarding the students' preferences and interests was not consistently documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure information regarding preferences and interests is included in IEPs for students by age fourteen. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age three.

XI. Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plan/functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determinations and interim alternative setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of suspension to the case manager. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

XIII. Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements, participation, and written notice for a K-8 district.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of diplomas for out-of-district students. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

XIV. Programs And Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding team teaching. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern in the area of class descriptions. The district has submitted an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

XV. Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent/adult student access to records, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other records.

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Area of Need:

Documentation of Locations - During the on-site visit it was determined that central files do not identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district as per N.J.A.C. 6:3.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the West Paterson Public School District on January 7, 8, and 9, 2002. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring 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. At the meeting, some parents expressed the need to have a better understanding of what services are or can be available to their children. They further indicated a need to have a more precise view of the process for identifying their children's needs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment included the areas of dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, native language, independent evaluations, all referral processes, vision & hearing screenings, identification meetings, multi-disciplinary and functional assessment, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, timelines for reevaluation process, participants for eligibility meeting, documentation of eligibility, copy of evaluation reports to parents, participants at IEP meetings, consideration/required statements, implementation dates, 90-day timeline, teacher knowledge/access, Oberti factors, consideration & documentation, regular education access, continuum, preschool transition, student agency invite, age 14 transition services needs, discipline, the area of statewide assessment, graduation participation, class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent/adult student access, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional/parent development, extended school year, transfer students, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notice, health summary for preschool, eligibility meetings, copies of evaluation reports and progress reports to parents, goals and objectives in alignment to the CCCS, annual review timelines, supplemental aids/services for preschool, documentation of discipline to case manager, diploma for out of district students, team teaching and class descriptions.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need regarding Child Find, multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, criteria for specific learning disabilities, IEP participants, consideration/required statements, individual decision making, age fourteen courses of study, preferences/interests, and documentation of locations of other records.

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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.

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