

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

**District:** West Windsor/Plainsboro

**County:** Mercer

**Monitoring Dates:** March 19,20,21,22,23, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** C. Carthew, P. Fair, A. Popovici, J. Vasquez, and K. Richards

**Background Information**

During the 1999-2000 school year, the West Windsor/Plainsboro 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 Windsor/Plainsboro 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 Windsor/Plainsboro 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 at Community Middle School on March 13, 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.

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**District Strengths:**

The district has recognized that good teachers are always learning. To that end, the district has developed the Institute for Professional Development. Professional growth seminars are available to staff on a wide range of topics and allow staff to earn credits toward their required 100 hours of professional development. The district's Professional Development Advisory Board reviews the seminars to ensure that they meet the needs of the district and those of individual staff members.

The district makes excellent use of computer technology by linking staff through an e-mail system. This system allows them to communicate with each other immediately about student progress, student concerns, and program needs. Staff commented frequently about their ability to quickly share and receive information regarding students rather than experience delays as a result of a traditional "paper" process.

The district has also demonstrated an ability to anticipate the unique needs of students. For example, the district was aware of a child who was not yet enrolled in the district, who would be attending classes sometime in the near future. The district proactively provided specialized training to staff prior to the enrollment of this student. This allowed the student to immediately benefit from an educational setting that was able to support her individual needs.

The district should be commended for taking the initiative to maintain students with significant behavioral issues within the district by developing in-district programs that have the capacity to address the individual needs of these students.

**Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**Reevaluation** was determined to be an area 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 areas of Policy and Procedures and public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff development for both special education and general education teacher.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding staff development.

**Areas of Need:**

**Staff Development** - The district and on-site monitoring identified ongoing staff development needs in the areas of behavioral supports and interventions, effective

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inclusive practices and support strategies, training for teacher aides, effective instructional strategies and accommodations for students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff development needs are addressed in the areas identified by the district and as a result of on-site monitoring. The plan should include a mechanism to allow the district to determine the effectiveness of the training.

**II. F.A.P.E.**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the provision of Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, length of school day and year, transfer students, and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of counseling. They indicated that the workload for counselors is too high and there is insufficient staff to provide the services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

**Areas of Need:**

**Extended School Year** - On-site record review and interviews with staff determined that the provision of extended school year services is not considered on an individual basis for all students. Extended school year is offered primarily to students placed in out-of-district programs and severely cognitively impaired students.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year services are considered and discussed for all students and that documentation of this discussion is included in IEPs.

**III. Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting timelines, providing notice, providing parents with copies of PRISE, participants, and providing independent evaluations when requested.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding native language, age of majority, and surrogate parents.

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**Areas of Need:**

**Native Language** – On-site record review determined that written notice is not consistently provided in the native language, even when feasible.

- The district will revise its improvement to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent whenever feasible.

**Age of Majority** – On-site record review and the interview process determined that prior to June 5, 2000 the district informed parents and students at least a year before the student's eighteenth birthday that rights under N.J.A.C. 6A: 14 would transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority. The district was unaware that the amended regulation now requires notification to parents and students at least three years before the student reaches age 18.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at least three years before the student reaches 18 the student and the parent are apprised of the transfer of rights.

**Surrogate Parents** – On-site record review and the staff interview process determined that the district does not have a policy or procedure in place to protect the rights of students in need of an individual to act as a surrogate parent.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to select and train surrogate parents and ensure that the surrogate parent has no conflict of interest with those of the student he or she represents.

**IV. LOCATION, REFERRAL, IDENTIFICATION**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with timelines for referrals, identification meetings, and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding direct referrals, child find information, and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need.

**Areas of Need:**

**Referral Process** - The district determined through self-assessment that the referral process differs from building to building. Direct referrals are sometimes referred back to the PAC committee before they are forwarded to the child study team for an identification meeting. The district further identified inconsistencies in implementing pre-referral interventions and the documentation of these interventions.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that staff have the opportunity to refer a student directly to the child study team and to participate in

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identification meetings to determine whether an evaluation is warranted. The plan must include a mechanism to inform staff of the direct referral procedure.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure referral procedures are implemented in a uniform manner throughout the district and that pre-referral interventions are consistently implemented and documented.

**Child Find Activities** – During self-assessment the district determined that Child Find activities are primarily conducted at the preschool level with little activity beyond this grade level.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure Child Find activities are expanded to include all grade levels.

**Vision and Hearing Screenings** - As a result of self-assessment the district determined that nurses complete annual vision and hearing screenings during the months school is in session. However, during the summer these screenings are not completed as part of the referral process.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that vision and hearing screenings are conducted in a timely manner during the summer and that documentation is maintained in the student record.

## **V. EVALUATION**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding consent, use of multi-disciplinary and standardized assessments, provision of signed and dated reports, conducting bilingual evaluations, and documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding speech evaluation reports.

### **Area of Need:**

**Speech Evaluation Reports** - During the on-site monitoring, a review of student files and speech evaluations indicated that speech-language evaluations do not consistently include documentation of interviews conducted with the student's parent and teacher.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that speech-language evaluations include all the required components of functional assessments.

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**VII. ELIGIBILITY**

**Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding eligibility meetings, components of notice, meeting participants, establishing eligibility based on required criteria and documentation.

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

**Areas of Need:**

**Provision of Evaluation Reports** – On-site monitoring, record review and the interview process determined that though the district provides a copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of the provision is not maintained in student records.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents is maintained in student records.

**VIII. IEP**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with notice, participants, required statements, implementation dates, and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district identified the need for a new format for goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

**Areas of Need:**

**Goals and Objectives for Speech and Occupational Therapy** – On-site review of student records determined that goals and objectives for speech and occupational therapy were not consistently developed in IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that goals and objectives for all related services are developed and included in the IEP.

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**IX. Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of supplementary aids and services and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities

During the self-assessment process, an area of need was identified by the district regarding regular education access through the in-class support model. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site regarding individual decision-making, and documentation of IEP considerations.

**Areas of Need:**

**In-Class Support Programs/ Individual Decision Making** – During the self-assessment process, the district identified the need for more in-class support programs. During on-site interviews with staff and the district’s identification of the need for more in-class support programs, it was determined the individual decision-making process is negatively impacted by the lack of availability of in-class programs in the district.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include the procedures that will be implemented to ensure the district has the capacity to provide in-class support programs to each student who requires that program.

**Consideration and Documentation** - On-site record review determined that the benefits of regular and special education classes and potential harmful effects on the student and other students are not consistently documented in student IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure consistent documentation of the decision-making process and the individual considerations that result in placement decisions.

**X. TRANSITION**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding attendance at preschool transition planning conferences, evaluation and placement in program by the third birthday, documentation of agency involvement, and IEP components for transition.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding procedures for transition from middle school to high school and the need for expanded

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vocational and career exploration opportunities. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding documentation of student interests and preferences and student invitations to meetings.

**Areas of Need:**

**Student Interests and Preferences** - During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of student records indicated that the manner in which student interests and preferences are obtained are inconsistently documented in IEPs.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that the manner in which student interests and preferences is obtained is consistently documented in IEPs.

**Student Invitations to Meetings** – Though high school students are invited to IEP meetings where transition will be discussed, invitations are not consistently issued to age-appropriate students at the middle school level.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that all age-appropriate students are invited to IEP meetings when the purpose is transition planning. The plan must include a component to ensure documentation is maintained in student records.

**XI. DISCIPLINE**

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, documentation to case manager, 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 disciplinary procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

**XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with participation, approved accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding alternative assessments.

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**Area of Need:**

**Alternative Assessment** - On-site monitoring determined that alternative assessments are not identified for students who are exempted from statewide assessments.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to adopt an alternative assessment until such time one is made available through the Department of Education.

**XIII. GRADUATION**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding IEP requirements, diploma and participation.

An area of need was identified during on-site monitoring regarding written notice.

**Area of Need:**

**Written Notice** – On-site record review and interviews with staff determined that the district does not provide written notice that graduation with a state endorsed diploma is considered a change of placement.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that adult students and parents are notified that graduation with a state endorsed diploma constitutes a change in placement.

**XIV. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, aides, schedules, home instruction approvals and certifications.

An area of need was identified during the on-site regarding group size for speech therapy groups.

**Area of Need:**

**Speech Therapy** - On-site record review determined that the number of students receiving speech therapy in a group smaller than five students is not indicated in IEPs on a consistent basis.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure the identification of the group size for speech services in the event five students is considered inappropriate for a particular student.

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**XV. STUDENT RECORDS**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

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

**Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Location of Student Files** - During the on-site monitoring, a review of central files indicated that these files do not identify the locations of other records in the district.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures that will be implemented to ensure that central files identify the locations of other student files maintained in the district.

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**Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the West Windsor / Plainsboro School District on March 19, 20, 21, 22 & 23, 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.

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.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included the reevaluation process, maintaining required policies and procedures, length of school day and year, facilities, transfer students, the provision of related services, independent evaluations, timelines, meeting participants, notice, assessments, eligibility criteria and meetings, the provision of supplemental aides and services, preschool transition, discipline standards, approved accommodations and modifications when participating in state-wide assessments, participating in graduation activities, class size, and procedures for the maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, the provision of counseling services, direct referrals, Child Find activities, vision and hearing screenings, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, regular education access, vocational and career exploration opportunities, transition from middle school to high school procedures and review of disciplinary procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year services, native language, surrogate parents, age of majority, speech evaluation reports, the provision of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of related services, speech group size, individual decision-making, alternative assessments, and written notice regarding 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.

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