

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: Westwood Regional School District

County: Bergen

Monitoring Dates: February 10, 11, 13 and 14, 2003

Monitoring Team: Damen Cooper, Gladys Miller and Jenifer Tucci

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Westwood 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 Westwood 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 Westwood 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 Westwood Regional High School on February 3, 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 its Star School recognition by the Office of Innovative Programs and Practices. Brookside Upper Elementary school has been named a New Jersey Star School for its excellence in addressing student's educational needs and for effectively addressing professional development needs.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

The district provides a "Puppets Are People, Too!" program. This program enhances awareness of essential social language skills to special needs students and provides an opportunity for creative expression which fosters character education. This program is also up for grant recognition.

The district also provides an extensive amount of community service. Additionally, the district is commended for its emphasis on the improvement of literacy. At Berkley Elementary School, the principal slept on the roof as a reward for his students reading five thousand books.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Least Restrictive Environment 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.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional and parent development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of professional and parent development because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services and monitoring IEP's. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the areas of adaptive physical education. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of adaptive physical education because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents and consent.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notices of meetings, written notice, meetings, native language and independent evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an appropriate timeline to bring about the required changes.** The improvement plan needs to be revised to include more appropriate timelines.

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 direct referrals, health summaries, identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process and vision and hearing screenings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an appropriate timeline to bring about the required changes.** The improvement plan needs to be revised to include more appropriate timelines.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area of summer referrals.

Area(s) of Need:

Summer Referrals – During the on-site visit, record review and staff interview indicated that timelines and evaluations are inconsistently met when referrals are initiated during the summer months because they do not have staff to complete required processes.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure mandated activities continue during the summer months. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedure

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance and rejection of reports.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments and written reports.

Area(s) of Need:

Multidisciplinary Evaluation for Preschool Students – During the on-site visit, record review indicated that for preschool evaluations, the district considers a speech assessment as one of the required two child study team assessments. However, because a speech assessment is an additional assessment and not one of the two, preschool evaluations lack one child study team assessment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure preschool evaluations contain at least two child study team assessments. If a speech assessment is required, it is an additional assessment and not one of the two required team assessments. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Written Reports – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that written reports are not consistently dated. As a result, it could not be determined when these reports were developed. In addition, the reports lack an analysis of instructional implications and the relevant behaviors appropriate to the student's academic functioning.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all reports are dated when developed and contain all required components. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, record review indicated that functional assessments do not include required components such as classroom observations, work samples, or trial teaching.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all functional assessments include required components. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and participants at planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluations when turning age five. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Statement of Eligibility – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that eligibility statements were included in the related service provider's assessment reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure assessment reports do not include eligibility determinations that may only be made by a duly constituted team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, consideration and required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines and teacher knowledge and access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 in the areas of courses of study and preferences and interests.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invitations, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs and age sixteen needed transition 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

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

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

Section X: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, behavior intervention plans and functional behavioral assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written notice of graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 waivers, age range waivers and home instruction approvals.

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of group sizes for speech therapy, collaboration time and class descriptions. 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 area of access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and adult access to student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of maintenance and destruction. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an appropriate timeline to bring about the required changes.** The improvement plan needs to be revised to include more appropriate timelines.

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

Area(s) of Need:

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

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Westwood Regional School District on February 10, 11, 13 and 14 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 nearly 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents believed that programs were compatible with the individual needs of their children. Furthermore parents felt the district conducted a thorough self-assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, direct referrals, health summaries, identification meeting participants and timelines, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, timelines, planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, meeting, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, courses, preference and interest, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool by age three, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, IEP requirements, diploma, out of district participation, class size waivers, age range waivers, home instruction approvals and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, related services, adaptive physical education, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, vision and hearing screenings, turning age five, copy of evaluation reports to parents, IEP participants, consideration and required statements, implementation dates, annual review timelines, ninety-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, agency involvement, student and agency invite, documentation to case manager, functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention plan, written notice of graduation, group sizes for speech therapy, collaboration time, class description, access and requests for student records and maintenance and destruction of records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding summer referrals, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, written reports, statement of eligibility and documentation of other locations of records.

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

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Westwood Regional School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.