

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

District: Wildwood Crest School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: February 18, 2004

Monitoring Team: Patricia Fair and Michael J. Lee

Background Information:

During the 2002-2003 school year, the **Wildwood Crest School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Wildwood Crest School District** with an opportunity to evaluate its performance, 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The **Wildwood Crest School District** developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Crest Memorial School on the evening of January 8, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the OSEP team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's superintendent/disciplinarian, the special education administrator/acting principal, the coordinator of special services, general education and special education teachers, related services providers, the school nurse, and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Wildwood Crest School District is commended for its success in having all preschool through third grade staff – general education and special education, as well as basic skills Title I teachers and paraprofessional staff – trained and certified at Level I of the Orton-Gillingham Phonic Approach. Implementation of this process has provided

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teachers with the opportunity to instruct students using an enhanced multi-sensory educational strategy.

The district takes great pride in its various parent training programs, the assistive technology program for disabled students, the study skills program that is offered to all students as part of the “specials” rotation, its after-school peer tutoring, the after-school open library, the school’s twenty extracurricular activities, the Summer Library, the Summer Pre-First Readiness program and the Summer Supplemental programs. In regard to assistive technology, the district employs a certified specialist who is available for staff training and support, in use of “Alpha-Smart,” “Co-Writer,” “Write Out Loud,” “Sound Field,” and “Phonic Ear,” as well as the low-tech devices, such as seat cushions, slant boards and pencil grips.

In addition, the district recognizes the innumerable community organizations and their members who actively participate and share in the district’s commitment to “Excellence in Teaching and Learning.” Project D.A.R.E and the Adopt-an-Officer Program are only two examples of the programs that are being offered at the school. Moreover, the weekly newsletters, reaching out to both in-district and out-of-district students, serve to keep this small community connected and informed.

Data Summary:

For students ages six to twenty-one, the district’s trend over the past three years has been to place fewer students in isolated settings; that is, excluded from the general education classroom more than sixty percent of the day, or in separate schools or residential facilities. Data show a drop from 10.3% to 6.0% to 2.9%; while for the same 2000, 2001 and 2002 period, state average figures were 28.9% to 28.2% to 26.9%. Importantly, other data confirm the district’s responsible commitment to placing students within the least restrictive environment by providing them with necessary supplementary aids and services in these general education settings. Further review of data shows an equitable distribution of students, as based on category of eligibility (e.g., autistic, emotionally disturbed, specific learning disability) and racial-gender groupings, across various placements.

Data provided by the district indicate smaller class sizes, a higher student attendance rate, and a lower student-to-faculty ratio when compared to the state averages. In regard to statewide assessment scores, results have been equally favorable. Using the last reported data (from the 2001-2002 school year) with all students included in the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA), the district evidenced, in language arts – 15.4% advanced proficient (state average: 6.0%), 74.4% proficient (sa: 73.1%), and 10.3% partially proficient (sa: 20.9%); and, in mathematics – 47.5% advanced proficient (sa: 27.2%), 30.0% proficient (sa: 41.3%), and 22.5% partially proficient (sa: 31.5%). Student educational growth, as measured by proficiency in statewide assessment, is maintained in the district as the student is preparing to enter high school. Using the last reported data (from the 2001-2002 school year) with all students included in the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), the district evidenced, in language arts – 8.8% advanced proficient (state average: 8.3%), 76.5% proficient (sa: 64.9%), and 14.7% partially proficient (sa: 26.8%); and, in mathematics – 23.5% advanced proficient (sa: 16.0%), 52.9% proficient (sa: 42.2%), and 23.5% partially proficient (sa: 41.8%). No data were available for special education students only for either statewide assessment.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Discipline and Statewide Assessment were determined by the district during self-assessment and confirmed by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site monitoring visit to be areas of compliance for the Wildwood Crest School District.

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 in-service training for professional and paraprofessional staff and parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs and related services, length of school day, facilities, and certification.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and frequency, location and duration of related services.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews with staff indicated the district does not consider extended school year services for every student determined eligible for special education and related services or eligible for speech and language services. In addition, for those students who are found in need of extended school year programming, IEPs do not include descriptions of the services needed, goals and objectives, implementation dates, and frequency, duration and location of services. As a result, review of a student's IEP by a parent, case manager, teacher, related services provider or administrator would not provide a clear understanding of the service(s) required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure that extended school year is considered for every student with disabilities and is provided when warranted. In the event an extended program is required, the IEP must include a description of the program, goals and objectives and all other required components to ensure full**

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implementation of the identified program and services. Implementation of these activities will ensure the district is appropriately addressing those factors that may lead academic regression and recoument issues. The improvement plan must include training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.

Frequency, Location and Duration of Related Services – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district does not consistently document the frequency, location and duration of related services. Further, the IEP often utilizes ranges to identify frequency (e.g., 1 to 2 times) and duration (e.g., 20 to 30 minutes). As a result, it is unclear when, where or for how long the service will be provided or the criteria that is being used to determine the frequency and duration.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure the IEP team identifies specific frequency, duration and location of all related services. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student receives the related services the IEP team has determined are necessary to derive full educational benefit from the student's educational program.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents and written notice timelines, particularly for students eligible for speech and language services only. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified notice of a meeting where transition will be discussed. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address this are because the activities fail to address the administrative barrier that prohibited students from attending the IEP meeting. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these activities.**

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

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process and identification meetings timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find 3-21, prereferral interventions and direct referrals from staff. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it does not include adequate activities to ensure that all students and preschool aged**

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children within the district, including nonpublic, homeless and/or migrant children, who may be disabled, are identified and referred to the district's child study team. The district did not submit a plan to address prereferral interventions in general education and needs to do so. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these activities.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summaries and vision and hearing screenings.

Area(s) of Need:

Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings – During the on-site visit a review of records and interviews indicated that at the time of the identification meeting, information concerning health summary and results of the vision and hearing screenings are not consistently made available by the school nurse.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that the school nurse develops health summaries and conducts vision and hearing screenings for every child referred for an evaluation and provides that information to the child study team prior to the identification meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure the team has the information necessary to determine the need for an evaluation as well as determine the suspected areas of disability that will need to be assessed. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports and speech and language reports. **The district did not submit a plan to address acceptance or rejection of reports and needs to do so. The district's plan for the speech and language reports is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that child study team members and the speech/language specialist do not include the required components of a functional assessment in their evaluation reports.

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- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluators include all required components of functional assessments in their reports. Implementation of these activities will ensure that evaluators include all assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations and then develop an appropriately written report, as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d)2. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting, participants at meetings, and reevaluations completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The district will revise the improvement plan to include this component.**

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

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of signatures of agreement or disagreement. While the district's improvement plan did not include activities to address this area, information obtained during the on-site monitoring, including staff interviews and record review, indicated the district has implemented appropriate and specific activities to bring about correction. New procedures, use of a revised form, staff training and administrative oversight were noted. In regard to the additional self-identified area of provision of evaluation reports to parents, the district was not referring to child study team reports, but instead, those that would be completed by outside agencies.

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

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, participants, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content

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Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, provision of IEP to parent, and teacher knowledge and access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of implementation dates, primarily for speech and language services, present levels of educational performance, and considerations and required components. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of 90-day timelines affording parents the opportunity to observe a proposed placement. **The district did not submit a plan to address the 90-day timeline issue and needs to do so. The district's plan regarding observation of proposed programs is insufficient because it lacks activities to address the administrative barrier that prohibited parents from doing so. The district will revise the improvement plan to include these activities.**

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

Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individual decision-making process, general education access, notification and participation of students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of least restrictive environment documentation and consideration of supplemental aids and services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring 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, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, and agency involvement.

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

Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

Although the Wildwood Crest School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade, during the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, and survey and assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

The Wildwood Crest School District services students from pre-Kindergarten to eighth grade and is not required to address issues of graduation.

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of common planning time. The district's plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and adult-student access to records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the **Wildwood Crest School District** on February 18, 2004. 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 public focus group meeting, eleven parents participated and expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In general, the district was praised for its academically challenging instruction, the professionalism and high quality of staff, the emphasis on mainstreaming students with disability into general education, the heightened communication between school and home, and the seamless transition of students from eighth grade into the receiving high school. Parents noted that special education timelines are maintained, meetings are conducted when necessary, IEP documents are kept current, a transition plan is developed in preparation for a student's fourteenth birthday, parents leave the IEP team meeting with a copy of the IEP, and the range of programming options is adequate. However, specific concerns were raised over budgetary constraints and the lack of related services being provided at the start of the school year. Parents reported that extended school year services and the provision of classroom or individual aides are routinely denied, because "there is no money." Several parents indicated that general education teachers are largely unaware of their responsibilities to implement an IEP effectively. One parent stated that general education teachers readily refuse to allow or provide accommodations and modifications or supplemental aids and services, as per an IEP, in the classroom. Parents expressed their collective fear that if they were to challenge this position, the student would be excluded from the mainstream and "shipped off to the special services school district." In regard to vocational training, several parents voiced their objections that a student needs to be declassified before the county technical school would admit that student.

Discipline and Statewide Assessment were sections demonstrating compliance with all standards.

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, provision of programs and related services, length of school day, facilities, certifications, consent, all meetings and participants, notices in native language, interpreters, independent evaluations, referral process, identification timelines, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluations completed by June 30th of the student's last year in preschool, criteria, statement of eligibility, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, provision of IEP to parent, teacher knowledge and access, individual decision-making process, general education access, notification and participation of student in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of program, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled placement by age three, agency involvement, class size, age range, group

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sizes for speech, home instruction, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records, and location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-serve training for professional and paraprofessional staff and parents, transfer procedures, surrogate parents, written notice timelines, notice of meeting when transition is being discussed, Child Find 3-21, prereferral interventions, direct referrals from staff, documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports, speech and language reports, reevaluation timelines, signatures of assenting or dissenting opinions, provision of evaluation report to parent, implementation dates, present levels of educational performance, IEP considerations and required components, ninety-day timelines, parents observing a proposed placement, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments, common planning time, and parent and adult-student access to records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, frequency, duration and location of related services, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, and functional assessments.

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