

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

District: Woodbine School District

County: Cape May

Monitoring Dates: April 7 – 9, 2003

Monitoring Team: Julia Harmelin and Jane Marano

Background Information:

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Woodbine School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Woodbine 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 Woodbine 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 Woodbine Elementary School on March 18, 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. Parents were interviewed by telephone.

District Strengths:

The district provides "Success for All" reading in grades kindergarten through six to help students with reading/language development. The implementation of this whole school reform model has improved the reading skills of many of the students, including students with disabilities.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

Graduation 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.

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 staff and parent development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this because it lacks procedures, in-service, 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 elements.

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 length of school day/year, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals/objectives for related services, transfer procedures, facilities, and oversight of IEP implementation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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.

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

Areas of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site visit, interviews and a review of student records indicated that extended school year services are considered for special education but not for related services. When an extended school year program is provided, the IEP does not contain a description of the program, goals and objectives, and implementation dates.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the provision of related services is considered as part of the extended school year program, the extended school year program is described in the IEP, the duration of the program is included in the IEP,**

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and goals and objectives are included for all areas that will be addressed during the extended school year program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Frequency and Duration of Related Services – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that IEPs may identify a range of services for the provision of related services (1-2 times a month, 20-40 minutes a day, or as needed).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs specifically identify the frequency and duration of the related services. If a range is identified, the IEP must include the criteria that is applied to determine specific services at any given point in time. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, and the provision of written notice when parents do not attend meetings.

Areas of Need:

Surrogate Parents – During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the district does not have a method for selecting and training surrogate parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include policy and procedures to ensure the selection and training of surrogate parents in the event one is needed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Consent for Reevaluation – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that the district does not consistently obtain or attempt to obtain consent prior to conducting any assessment as part of a reevaluation. Additionally, when consent was obtained, the district had already conducted the assessments.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that consent is obtained prior to conducting any assessment as part of a reevaluation (except when the district can demonstrate that it has taken reasonable measures to obtain consent from the parent and the parent failed to respond). The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Notices of Meetings/Written Notices – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that notices of a meeting do not consistently identify the purpose of the meeting, identify by discipline the participants who will be attending the meeting, and do not include a statement that the parent has the right to invite other individuals with knowledge or expertise to the meeting when the purpose of the meeting is to develop, review, and/or revise the IEP. In addition, notices of a meeting do not inform the parents that transition will be discussed, when appropriate. Written notices following meetings do not consistently contain a description of any other factors that are relevant to the proposal or refusal by the district.

- **The district will revise its notices of meetings and written notices to ensure they contain all required components. It is recommended the district uses the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Provision of Written Notice – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that when parents do not attend meetings, written notice is not consistently provided to them within 15 days of the meeting for their consideration of the proposed action. As a result, proposed actions are implemented without affording parents the right to consider the action for 15 days.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents are provided with written notice within 15 days of meetings and before any proposed action is implemented. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals from parents/staff, and identification meeting timelines during the school year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral documentation of interventions and effectiveness, summer referrals, health summary, and vision and hearing screenings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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.** The district further identified concerns in the area of referral from the Family Support Team to the Child Study Team. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding identification meeting participants.

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Area of Need:

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that the full child study team and the regular education teacher do not attend identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the required participations are in attendance at the identification meeting. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, use of standardized assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance/rejection of reports. **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.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding components of functional assessments for child study team evaluations.

Area of Need:

Functional Assessments for Child Study Team Evaluations – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that evaluations to determine if a student is eligible for special education and related services do not include all the required components of functional assessments. Specifically, evaluations do not consistently include a student observation in other than a testing session, an interview with the referring teacher(s), and a review of interventions documented by the classroom teacher(s) and others who work with the student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that child study team evaluations include the required components of a functional assessment. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and reevaluations for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of regular education teacher participation at reevaluation planning meetings and the use of statistical formulas for reevaluation of SLD students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding special education teacher participation at reevaluation planning meetings and reevaluation timelines.

Areas of Need:

Reevaluation Meeting Participants – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that special education teachers do not consistently attend reevaluation planning meetings for students who are eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that special education teachers are in attendance at reevaluation planning meetings. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Reevaluation Timelines – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that reevaluations are not conducted within three years of the previous classification.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that within three years of the previous classification a reevaluation is completed to determine whether the student continues to be a student with a disability. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants at meetings, and provision of evaluation reports to parents. **The district's**

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improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding agreement/disagreement of eligibility and rationale for disagreement.

Area of Need:

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement of Determination of Eligibility – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff and a review of student records indicated that the IEP team does not certify in writing whether they agree or disagree with the determination of eligibility nor do they provide a rationale as to why they disagree.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that members of the IEP team document their agreement or disagreement with the determinations of eligibility. The 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 IEP components, IEP goals and objectives, IEP implementation dates, procedures for revising IEPs, and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meeting participants, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, and implementation of IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding annual review timelines for students classified as eligible for special education and related services.

Area of Need:

Annual Reviews - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of student records indicated that IEPs for students classified as eligible for special education and related services are not consistently reviewed on an annual basis.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that annual reviews are conducted in a timely manner. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making and continuum of services. The district identified barriers to providing services in the least restrictive environment due to space limitations, insufficient staff, and financial constraints. Individualized decision-making is based on the availability of programs, not on the needs of the student. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant 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 X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of statement of transition services needs (age 14), courses of study, preferences and interests, student and agency invitations, and agency involvements. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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 X: Transition to Preschool

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs by age three.

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

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Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notification of removals to case managers, and identification of potentially disabled. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding the development of behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, and in-school suspension procedures. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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 XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of participation in statewide assessments. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas 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 XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, group size for speech therapy, homebound instruction, and common planning time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of special education class description. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns regarding employing sufficient special education staff and related service providers (speech and counseling), child study team having apportioned time for case management responsibilities, and provision of services in the pull-out resource program at the elementary level for more than one half of the instructional day. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these**

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areas 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of special education services.

Area of Need:

Special Education Services – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff indicated that special education teachers and special education classroom aides are often pulled from their classroom assignments to provide coverage for other school staff. When the resource room aide is reassigned to another class or duty the group size for resource programs exceeds the limits.

- **The district will immediately cease using special education teachers and classroom aides to cover teacher absences. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it obtains substitute services to cover teacher absences. The plan must further include a mechanism to provide compensatory services to those students who did not receive services when their teachers and/or classroom aides were removed. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parents/adult student access to records, and procedures for destruction of records.

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

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

Area of Need:

Documentation of Other Locations – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of cumulative files indicated that central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Woodbine School District on April 7, 8, and 9, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with teacher availability and communication with the child study team and director. Parents expressed concerns with the availability of program options (district does not have in-class support programs or self-contained programs), individual decision-making regarding placement, the need for more classroom aides, referral process, the need for more basic skill classes, and pre-referral interventions in regular education classes,

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school day/year, certification, meetings, native language, independent evaluations, direct referrals from parents/staff, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluations for students turning age 5, eligibility determination, IEP components, IEP goals/objectives, IEP implementation dates, IEP revisions, age of majority, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition, discipline procedures, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, interim alternative education settings, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, alternate assessment, graduation, age range, group size for speech therapy, homebound instruction, common planning time, parent/adult student access to student records, and procedures for destruction of pupil records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent development, goals/objectives for related services, transfer procedures, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, regular and special education teachers at meetings, pre-referral process, summer referrals, health summary, acceptance/rejection of evaluation reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access to IEPs, implementation of IEPs, least restrictive environment, individualized decision-making, continuum of services, transition from school to post-school (age 14), discipline, participation in statewide assessment, employing sufficient special education staff and related service providers (speech and counseling), apportioned time for case management responsibilities, and documentation of access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, frequency and duration of related services, surrogate parents, consent for reevaluation, content of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notices following meetings, identification meeting participants, functional assessments for child study team evaluations, reevaluation planning meeting participants, reevaluation timelines, certification of agreement/disagreement of determination of eligibility, annual reviews for students classified as eligible for special

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education and related services, provision of special education services, and documentation of other locations of pupil records.

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