

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Warren County Special Services School District

County: Warren

Monitoring Dates: May 5 – 8, 2003

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Background Information:

During the 2001 – 2002 school year, the Warren County Special Services School District (WCSSSD) conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the WCSSSD 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 development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.

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 WCSSSD developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) 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.

During the monitoring process, the monitoring team reviewed WCSSSD documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in IEPs, staff evaluations, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students/ teachers/related service personnel, and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with the WCSSSD's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers and related service personnel.

District Strengths:

The WCSSSD is commended for providing all special education classes exclusively in public school settings. They currently offer programs in the areas of preschool disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, behavioral disabilities and severe cognitive impairments. WCSSSD is operating seventeen classes, which are being hosted by eleven school districts including: Belvidere, Franklin Township, Great Meadows Regional, Hackettstown, Harmony, Knowlton, Pohatcong, Stillwater, Warren County Technical School, Warren Hills Regional, and Washington Borough. Special education classes in these settings provide the opportunity for educational and social integration, which are difficult to provide in

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separate settings. All of the host school districts offer a truly individualized educational experience by providing opportunities for integration of their special and general education students.

WCSSSD takes great pride in the ability of their staff to provide students, who primarily have lower incidence disabilities, with specialized instruction and services, particularly in the areas of augmentative communication, job skills training, sensory integration and applied behavioral analysis. In addition, through a cooperative effort with the host school nurses, they are able to include students who need to be tube fed, suctioned, or provided with oxygen as well as those who have seizure disorders or other medical conditions.

WCSSSD's junior and senior high school multiple disabled (MD) classes focus a portion of their day on job awareness and vocational training activities. WCSSSD is currently offering job shadowing, on the job training or in-class contract work assignments, depending on the nature of the student's program as indicated by the IEP. The WCSSSD staff has formed a positive rapport with the staff of the Bergen County Special Services School District in order to gain knowledge and support from a similar school district that provides extensive vocational training for their MD students.

An important focus of the WCSSSD class programs is on community involvement. To this end, they have several vans for use by the staff in transporting students to field trips, job training sites and special activities such as swimming, Special Olympics, and math fairs. Several of the WCSSSD classes also participate in swimming programs in the community. Some of the students with autism swim on a weekly basis and receive swim instruction from trained personnel.

WCSSSD recognizes the potential benefits of utilizing modern technology within their classrooms. Computers and the Internet are widely used by the students throughout the district. Creative projects using computer graphics are often integrated into the curriculum. In addition, they promote the use of various forms of assistive technology such as electronic communication and adaptive computer software and devices. They are actively involved with the Warren County Technical School's Assistive Technology Grant Program. Three classes that are housed at Harmony Elementary School are taking part in a pilot program whereby intensive training is being given by the grant program consultant. The equipment and materials that are available on loan through the grant are being made available to students while the staff is being trained on their use.

WCSSSD organizes a Preschool Special Olympics Program on an annual basis for all preschool disabled students in Warren County. Approximately 100 students participate in a series of Olympic events with their peers. The program is complete with all the fanfare of an Olympic event such as an opening ceremony and award ribbons. Hundreds of local volunteers from the schools as well as the community offer their time, services, and resources to this event.

WCSSSD has an active Parent-Staff Organization (PSO). The PSO is designed to afford the WCSSSD parents and staff the opportunity to collaborate on issues of mutual interest relating to the students in the district. The PSO organizes activities that serve to improve the quality and scope of the services provided by the district. Special event days, social activities, and classroom donations have all been supported by PSO fund-raising initiatives.

The **Warren Hills Regional School District** currently hosts two WCSSSD classes. A school social worker for the Warren Hills Regional School District started the first chapter

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of the Best Buddies program in New Jersey which is based on the International Best Buddies Organization. This program allows special education students and their age appropriate peers from the general education classes to participate in such activities as dances, parties, field trips and service projects.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Staff Requirements were determined to be areas of compliance by the WCSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, annual reports and program provided in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of staff development and amendments. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, physical education, hearing aids, services provided at no cost to parents, extended school year programs, provision of IEP services and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified a concern in the area of observation of programs. **The receiving school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need 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 IV: Facility Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of programs provided in approved facilities, certificate of occupancy/inspections and fire drills. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to correct these areas.

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

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Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings conducted annually, signatures present on IEPs, current IEPs, IEP accessibility, informing staff of IEP responsibilities, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, IEP implementation and progress reports.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of annual IEP meetings, IEP meeting held with appropriate participants, communication to sending districts, no delay in IEP implementation, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards (CCCS) and transition. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities in the area of IEP meeting participants to correct this area.

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

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standard disciplinary procedures, removal of student pending mediation or due process, changes to program/placement, interim alternative education setting and termination of student from program

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of procedures for time out rooms, suspensions, the use of restraints and aversive therapy. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of description of special class programs, certifications, special classes implementing IEP, home instruction, dispensing medication/nursing services, medical exams for sports, and preschool programs.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of class size, age range exceptions and CCCS including core curriculum content standards for students with severe disabilities (CCCSSD). The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the provision of physical education (PE).

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Area of Need:

Provision of Physical Education (PE) - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that WCSSSD is providing PE to students who cannot be included in the general PE classes but they are not appropriately documenting that they are providing these students with PE in accordance with CCCS.

- **The school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the WCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of conformance to pupil record code, return of records, access to records, access sheets, location of records, daily attendance, and student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified concerns in the areas of tardiness, absences, and written notice of attendance. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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Summary

The receiving school is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the receiving school was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The receiving school is further commended for the many areas determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the WCSSSD on May 5-8, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the WCSSSD's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the WCSSSD's improvement plan.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the WCSSSD during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, annual reports, programs provided in nonsectarian settings, length of school day/year, physical education, hearing aids, services provided at no cost to parents, extended school year programs, provision of IEP services, related services, certified/licensed staff, use of physical therapy assistants and certified occupational therapy assistants, employment/job descriptions of paraprofessionals, criminal history verification, having an approved professional development plan, signatures present on IEPs, current IEP, IEP accessibility, notification of IEP responsibilities, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, IEP implementation, progress reports, standard disciplinary procedures, removal of student pending mediation or due process, changes to program/placement, interim alternative educational setting, termination of student, description of special class programs, certifications, special class implementing IEP, home instruction, dispensing medication/nursing services, medical exams for sports, preschool programs, conformance to pupil record code, return of records, access to records, access sheets, location of records, daily attendance, and student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the WCSSSD identified areas of need regarding staff development, amendments, observation of programs, programs in approved facilities, certificate of occupancy/inspections, fire drills, annual IEP meetings, IEP meeting participants, communication to sending districts, no delay in IEP implementation, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards (CCCS) including core curriculum content standards for students with severe disabilities (CCCSSD), transition, procedures for time out rooms, restraints, aversives, suspensions, timelines, class size, age range exceptions, notification to sending districts of tardiness and absences, and written notice of attendance.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding documentation of provision of physical education.

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