

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Atlantic County Special Services School District (ACSSSD)

County: Atlantic

Monitoring Dates: March 8, April 3-5, 2006

Monitoring Team: Barbara Groff, Dolores Walther, Catherine Thomas, Barbara Ciancaglini, Deborah Magee, Judyth Vazquez, Elaine Lerner

Background Information:

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Atlantic County Special Services School District (ACSSSD) conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the ACSSSD 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 ACSSSD 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 receiving school 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 receiving school's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents, students and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

ACSSSD is commended for its school-to-career program which offers both school-based and community-based learning beginning in the middle school. Comprehensive cross-curricular instruction is provided in all programs.

The district operates a full-service restaurant and a self-service cafeteria which are frequented by the general public. Students receive introductory training in simple food preparation and instruction in the variety of skills necessary for waiting tables. In the school store, students receive experience in organizing and operating the business,

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including on-going tasks such as advertising, inventory selection and control, pricing and accounting. Students enrolled in the woodshop program create items such as Adirondack-styled lawn furniture and receive preparation for careers in carpentry. High school aged students are also encouraged to engage in supervised mentoring/tutoring services for younger students.

The district is also recognized for on-going collaboration with community resources. As students prepare for post school employment they are placed in a number of local enterprises, offering experience in such areas as stock control, office work, hospitality services and food service. Opportunities for volunteering in community sites, such as nursing homes and the adopt-a-highway program are made available to interested students.

The district operates several specialty clinics, in collaboration with a variety of professional organizations. Parents and students, whose access to appropriate clinical services might be limited, receive free or reduced rate services in the on-site Mental Health Clinic, the Wheelchair and Augmentative Appliance Clinic, the Dental Clinic, the Orthopedic Clinic and the Pediatric Clinic.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Annual Review and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by ACSSSD's self assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the ACSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding policies and procedures, annual reports, amendments and programs provided in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, the ACSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding staff development relating to joint training of parents, teachers and related services staff. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area 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 bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the onsite visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the ACSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs and provision of services as per IEP.

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During the self-assessment process, the ACSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding maintenance of hearing aids and program open to observation by LEA and NJDOE. 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 bring about correction in these areas.

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

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During the self-assessment process, the ACSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, procedures for removal of student to interim alternative educational setting and termination of student placement. The 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 for correction in these areas.

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the ACSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, teachers trained and instructing in CCCS, collaboration for home instruction, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services and provision of nursing services.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding class size and age range and evaluations for related services.

Summary of Findings:

Class Size and Age Range- During the onsite visit, through record reviews, classroom observations and staff interviews, it was determined that many classes do not conform to regulatory standards for class size and age range. Requests for exceptions have not been submitted to the county office for review and approval.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school requests exceptions through the sending school districts. Prior written approval by the county office is required when exceeding the age range as specified in New Jersey Administrative Code. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Evaluations for Related Services- During the onsite visit, through record reviews and staff interviews, it was determined that the school provides evaluations for speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy without communicating with sending districts.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that requests for related services evaluations are forwarded to the sending district when it is believed that a student is in need of a related service evaluation(s). It is the responsibility of the sending district to convene a meeting of the IEP team, who will determine the need for such an evaluation(s). If the IEP determines that a related service evaluation(s) is necessary, the sending district has the responsibility of determining who will conduct the evaluation and obtaining parental consent for the evaluation.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the ACSSSD on March 8, April 3-5, 2006. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the ACSSSD's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

The receiving school is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the receiving school was able to identify most areas of need and develop an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring address these areas. The receiving school is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result all identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, 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.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Annual Review and Student Records were determined to be areas of compliance by the ACSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the ACSSSD during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, annual reports, amendments, programs provided in nonsectarian settings, length of school day and year, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, provision of nursing services, conformance to student records code, return of records upon termination of student placement, access to records limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the ACSSSD identified areas of need regarding staff development relating to joint training of staff, parents and related service providers, maintenance of hearing aids, program open to observation, standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, procedures for removal of student to interim alternative educational setting and termination of student placement.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding class size and age range and evaluations for related services.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the ACSSSD 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.