

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Essex County Educational Services Commission

County: Essex

Monitoring Dates: January 12 – 14, 2003

Monitoring Team: Susan Smahl, Janet Wright, Elaine Lerner, Ann Marie Bruder

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Essex County Educational Services Commission Schools (Essex Junior Academy, the Valley School, and Essex High School) conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Essex County Educational Services Commission Schools (ECESC) 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 Essex County Educational Services Commission Schools 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, related service personnel and parents.

School Strengths:

The **Essex Junior Academy**, the **Essex High School** and the **Valley School** are commended for behavior management and academic programming tailored to meet the needs of a variety of students with disabilities.

The **Essex Junior Academy** provides students with a school wide behavior management program that focuses on developing improved decision-making skills and reinforcing positive behaviors. The school incorporates the swim program at Montclair State University into the existing physical education program and schedules home

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economics class for each student, engaging students in visual-motor and gross motor tasks while developing life skills. Students are enrolled in a network computer program that supports reading development, mathematics, social studies, and science and language arts skills in which each student is individually placed. The school provides a nurturing environment for its middle school aged students along with an academic curriculum that promotes success.

The **Essex High School** received the 2003 Innovation in Special Education Award for its Music Technology Program. This program provides its students with a comprehensive music technology program that enables them to develop skills in the latest recording and computer techniques by using state of the art recording equipment. The Essex High School also provides a photography program and distributes a parent and student newsletter which communicates information to families about the school. The Essex High School has a College and Career Center to assist students in exploring post graduation options.

The **Valley School** offers an alternative educational environment for students in grades 8 – 12. The school expands the walls of the classroom by scheduling education trips into the larger community and incorporates a myriad of hands-on learning experiences. Community service is scheduled through the year, including an ongoing town clean-up, planting and beautification project and an annual Fashion Showcase that provides students the opportunity to perform in front of an audience.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards:

General Provisions and **Facility Requirements** were determined to be areas of compliance by all the **ECESC Schools** during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Discipline was determined to be an area of compliance by **Essex Junior Academy** and **Essex High School** during self assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs, program observation by LEA and DOE, provision of counseling and occupational therapy services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment, the **Valley School** and the **Essex High School** accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the **Valley School** and the **Essex High School** identified concerns in the area of length of school day and year. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding hearing aids procedures for all schools.

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Area of Need:

Policy and Procedure for Maintenance of Hearing Aids – During the on-site visit, through interviews and a review of documentation of **ECESC Schools'** current policies and procedures, it was determined that the schools do not have a policy and procedure for the maintenance of hearing aids.

- **The ECESC Schools will develop a policy and procedure to ensure that hearing aids are functioning properly and will provide staff training when students who use hearing aids are enrolled in the school.**

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding certified/licensed staff, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at the county office and having an approved professional development plan.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding criminal history verification procedures for all **ECESC Schools**.

Area of Need:

Criminal History Verification – During the on-site visit interviews and record reviews indicated that not all staff have criminal history clearance to be working in the schools' programs. According to the schools' directors, applications have been filed and are in process however, emergent hiring forms were never completed and approved by the county office. In addition, some employees are working under criminal history clearance from a previous district or school.

- **The school will immediately schedule criminal history verification for those staff members who are employed by the school who require them and request written permission for emergent hiring from the county superintendent pending completion of the review. The school must submit this documentation to the county office of education within 10 days. In addition, the school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that all staff members are fingerprinted for criminal history verification or have obtained authorization for emergent hiring through the county superintendent.**

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely

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implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, implementation of proposed IEP components and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit for all schools regarding communication to the sending districts regarding missing IEP components.

Area of Need:

Communication to the Sending District Regarding Missing IEP Components –

During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the schools do not consistently communicate to sending districts when IEP components are missing. Areas consistently missing include measurable goals and objectives, missing goals and objectives and annual review dates that didn't match the date of the meetings,.

- **The receiving schools will revise their improvement plans to include activities and procedures to ensure that they communicate with sending districts when any IEP components including measurable goals and objectives, goals and objectives and annual review dates are missing, incomplete or incorrect. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedure.**

An additional area of need was identified at the **Valley School** during the on-site regarding current IEPs in the classroom.

Area of Need:

Current IEP - During the on-site visit record review indicated that although current IEPs were found in the central files, the classroom teachers had outdated IEPs.

- **The Valley School will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that classroom teachers have current documents for their students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, removal of student to interim alternative education setting and procedures for termination of placement.

The **Essex Junior Academy** and the **Essex High School** accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of notification to sending districts regarding suspensions.

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During the self-assessment process, the **Valley School** identified concerns in the areas regarding notification to districts of suspension. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding special class program descriptions maintained at the county office, teachers trained in CCCSs, teachers instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, and policies and procedures relating to school functions and services.

During the on-site visit areas of needs were identified in all schools regarding class size/age range, exceptions for class size and age range and dispensing medication/nursing services.

Areas of Need:

Class Size/Age Range and Exceptions – During the on-site visit staff interview and record review indicated that school personnel do not know the appropriate procedures for requesting exceptions for class size and/or age range through the sending districts.

- **The schools will revise their improvement plans to include procedures to ensure that exceptions for class size and/or age range are requested through the sending districts. The plan must include in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Dispensing Medication/Nursing Services – During the on-site visit staff interviews and record review indicated that the **ECESC Schools** do not employ a certified school nurse, although the **Essex Junior Academy** has a substitute school nurse.

- **The school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that N.J.A.C. 6A:16 requirements are implemented with a certified school nurse as required for specified activities or develop a nursing services plan for review and approval by the county superintendent. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit at the **Essex Junior Academy** regarding evaluation without referral.

Area of Need:

Evaluation Without Referral - During the on-site visit, through staff interviews and record review it was determined that related services providers conduct evaluations for students in attendance at the school without making a referral to the child study team of the sending district and include recommendations in the evaluation reports. When the receiving school believes that an enrolled student may benefit from related services not

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designated in the IEP, regulations require a referral to the child study team of the sending district. The IEP team determines whether or not an evaluation is warranted and if the related services should be added to the IEP.

- **The school will revise its improvement plan to ensure that when the school believes that an enrolled student may benefit from a related service not designated in the IEP, a referral must be made to the child study team of the sending district. The improvement plan must include in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the **ECESC Schools** accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination, access to records is limited to authorized persons, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences and maintenance of student health records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit for all schools regarding written notice of attendance.

Area of Need:

Written Notice of Attendance – During the on-site visit through record reviews it was determined that all **ECESC Schools** do not consistently provide written notification to the Department of Education through the County Office of Education within ten calendar days of the student's first day of attendance.

- **The ECESC schools will revise their improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school provides written notification to the Department of Education through the County Office of Education within ten days of the student's first day of attendance. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted at the **Essex County Educational Services Commission (ECESC) Schools** on January 12 – 14, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the **ECESC Schools'** report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

The **ECESC Schools** are commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self assessment process. As a result of that review, the schools were able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The schools are further commended for the areas determined by the receiving school and verified by the Department of Education as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the **ECESC Schools** during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, staff development, annual reports, amendments, non-sectarian, provision of physical education, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs, program observation by LEA and DOE, provision of counseling services, provision of occupational therapy, certified and licensed staff, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals, professional development plan, facility requirements, annual IEP meetings, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP meeting conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants, IEP accessibility, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, implementation of proposed IEP components, informing parents of progress, standard disciplinary procedures, procedures fro time-out rooms, restraints and aversive therapies, removal of students pending mediation and due process, changes to program and placement, removal of student to interim education setting, procedures for termination of placements, special class programs descriptions, teachers trained in CCCSs, teachers instructing in CCCSs, collaboration for home instruction, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, conformance to pupil record code, return of record upon termination, access to records, access sheets, location of other records, daily attendance, written communication to the LEAs regarding tardiness and absence and student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the **Valley School** and **Essex High School** identified areas of need regarding length of school day and year. In addition, the **Valley School** identified concerns in the area regarding notification to districts regarding suspensions.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need for all **ECESC Schools** within the various standards regarding hearing aids procedures, criminal history verification, communication to the sending districts regarding missing IEP components including measurable goals and objectives, procedures for exception for age range/class size, dispensing medication and nursing services and written notice of attendance.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need at the **Essex Junior Academy** regarding evaluation without referral.

The on-site visit identified an additional area of need at the **Valley School** regarding current IEPs in the classroom.

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This report identifies an area of non-compliance that requires immediate action by the school administration. The Essex County Educational Services Commission will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the remaining areas of need within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report.