

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Receiving School Monitoring

Receiving School: Gloucester County Special Services School District (GCSSSD)

County: Gloucester

Monitoring Dates: March 9, 10, 11, and 23, 2004

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

Background Information:

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Gloucester County Special Services School District (GCSSSD) conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the GCSSSD 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 GCSSSD 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 GCSSSD's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, related service persons and parents.

School Strengths:

The GCSSSD is commended for the level of collaboration and cooperation of the staff across program sites. These efforts afford the development of innovative instructional strategies and enable staff to share resources to address student issues. An example of this is the effectiveness of the integrated instructional related services model used throughout the district. In addition, the district offers students an exceptionally diverse range of recreational, extracurricular and community based experiences. Staff members are recognized for the level and degree of commitment and enthusiasm beyond their prescribed job descriptions. This was demonstrated by a high level of staff volunteerism to support student participation.

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The GCSSSD provides a broad spectrum of vocational training programs complemented by supported work experiences. The district has established an exceptional relationship with the county vocational school to afford students seamless vocational training opportunities across campuses. For shared time students, special services staff provide instructional support to complement the vocational program. These efforts frequently lead to meaningful post secondary employment opportunities for graduates of these programs. In addition, staff interviews make evident the district's commitment to the development of new programs focused on increasing vocational options that will lead to post-secondary employment and independence.

The GCSSSD also provides a model inclusive education program for students with auditory disabilities, which is located in public elementary and middle school buildings. The district is commended for its success in the extent to which they involve parents in school and community activities, training programs and family support groups in its effort to maintain the home-school-community partnership.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, FAPE, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Discipline, and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the GCSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the GCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, signatures of participants present on IEPs, teachers and providers access to IEPs, teachers and providers informed of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, implementation of IEP components and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, the GCSSSD identified concerns in the areas regarding IEP meetings conducted with required participants, receipt of IEPs prior to implementation, and communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of IEP meetings conducted with required participants and receipt of IEPs prior to implementation. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews indicated the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of communication to sending districts regarding missing components because it lacks a mechanism to ensure that IEPs are reviewed for all components including goals and objectives for counseling. The school developed and is using a review form for missing IEP components that does not address counseling goals and objectives. The form must be revised to include these components.**

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

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Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the GCSSSD accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination of placement, access to records limited to authorized persons, use of access sheets, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness or absence, written notice of placement to the county office, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the GCSSSD identified concerns in the area regarding location of other records specified in central file. 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 the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the GCSSSD on March 9, 10, 11, and 23, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the GCSSSD's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the GCSSSD's improvement plan.

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 areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with minor 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.

General Provisions, FAPE, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements, Discipline, and Programs and Services were determined to be areas of compliance by the GCSSSD during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the GCSSSD during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included IEP meeting conducted at least annually, IEP conducted with students when appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, service delivery, teachers and providers access to IEPs, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, implementation of IEP components, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination of placement, access to records limited to authorized persons, use of pupil record access sheets, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness or absence, written notice of placement to the county office, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the GCSSSD identified areas of need regarding IEP conducted with required GCSSSD participants, receipt of IEPs prior to implementation, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components, and location of other records specified in central file.

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

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