

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

Receiving School: ARC Essex County – Stepping Stones **County:** Essex

Monitoring Dates: November 15 – 17, 2004

Monitoring Team: Ann Marie Bruder and Diane Mari

Background Information:

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Stepping Stones School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Stepping Stones School 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 Stepping Stones School 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 and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The Stepping Stones School is commended for its interdisciplinary team approach to program implementation. The school provides parental support and networking opportunities to the parents through their monthly trainings.

The Stepping Stones School also provides future vision planning meetings which allows the team to discuss where the child will be three years. Emphasis is placed on social, academic, emotional, transitional, independent skills and progress in these areas examining possible future needs.

The Stepping Stones School also has a strong transition component to its program. The staff of the Stepping Stones School serves as a resource for other school placements as

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students move to other educational programs. Teachers and therapeutic staff communicate with aides, teachers and therapists from the new school placement. The school encourages the new teachers and therapists to visit the Stepping Stones School to look at strategies, routines and procedures that have been successful for the child. The staff also makes visitations to the new school location to assist in the transition process giving the opportunity for a smooth, successful transition to take place for the student.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

General Provisions, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements and Discipline, were determined to be areas of compliance by the Stepping Stones 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 Stepping Stones School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT) services as per IEP, provision of physical therapy (PT) services as per IEP, provision of speech language services as per IEP and provision of counseling services as per IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stones School identified concerns in the areas regarding the implementation of an adaptive physical education curriculum and maintenance of hearing aids. The school's improvement plan was sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the 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 V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Stepping Stone School 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, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers 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 Stepping Stones School identified concerns in the areas regarding communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components. The receiving school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP goals and objectives and implementation and follow up of the sensory integration therapy in the classroom.

Areas of Need:

Criteria of Mastery of Goals and Objectives – During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interview indicated that although it is not the receiving school's responsibility to do so, the Stepping Stones School staff is providing IEP annual goals and objectives to the IEP team. While the goals and objectives are aligned with the Core Curriculum Standards, they lack the criteria for being observable and measurable.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to either offer IEP teams goals and objectives that are individualized, observable and measurable or communicate with the sending district to ensure that the IEP team revises the goals and objectives provided by Stepping Stones School to make certain that they are individualized, observable and measurable.**

Provision of Sensory Integration Therapy – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the teachers and classroom paraprofessionals are conducting Wilbarger brushing, joint compressions, and biting/oral motor exercises for the students. Although the staff is trained on these sensory integration techniques, the teachers and classroom paraprofessionals are conducting these activities during varied times through out the day without continued supervision from the related services personnel.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that related services are administered by appropriately certified staff members. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent compliant implementation of the procedures.**

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Stepping Stones School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services and medical exams for sport teams.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stones School identified concerns in the areas regarding teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs and a written procedure for school/class trips. The school's improvement plan was 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 to these areas.

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An additional area of need was identified regarding the provision of nursing services and the nursing facility.

Areas of Need:

Nursing Services and Nursing Facility - During the on-site visit, staff interviews confirmed that the school contracts with a registered nurse and does not employ a certified school nurse as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:16. In addition, a tour of the facility confirmed that the school does not have a nurse's station as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:26-6.2.

- **The school will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that nursing services is provided in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16 by employing a full time certified school nurse. In addition, the school must identify an appropriate location for the provision of nursing services with final facility approval from the county office of education.**

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Stepping Stone School 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 5 days of tardiness /absences, written notice of placement to county office, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stones School identified concerns in the area concerning communication of policies and procedures for access to student records. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Stepping Stones School on November 15 – 16, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Stepping Stones School report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

General Provisions, Staff Requirements, Facility Requirements and Discipline were determined to be areas of compliance by the Stepping Stones School during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the Stepping Stones School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, extended school year programs and services provided in accordance with IEPs, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, provision of services as per IEP, provision of occupational therapy (OT) physical therapy (PT) speech language services and counseling services as per IEP, 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, current IEP prior to service delivery, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing relating to administration, statewide testing for support and assistance, implementation of IEP components, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction, dispensing medication, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services, medical exams for sport teams, 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 5 days of tardiness /absences, written notice of placement to county office, and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Stepping Stones School identified areas of need regarding implementation of an adaptive physical education curriculum and maintenance of hearing aides, communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, written procedure for school/class trips and policies and procedures regarding access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives in IEPs, teachers and paraprofessional staff providing sensory integration techniques in the classroom and nursing facilities/services.

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