

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

**Receiving School:** Somerset Hills Learning Institute      **County:** Somerset

**Monitoring Dates:** June 7-8, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Paul Bilik, Denise Wilkens

**Background Information:**

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

**School Strengths:**

The Somerset Hills Learning Institute curriculum infuses applied behavior analysis techniques that provide immediate feedback to students to encourage and reinforce learning while giving them a sense of success in the classroom.

The school is also to be commended for developing curriculum modifications using a wide variety of technology including hand held PDAs (palm pilots) that assist students with time management and conversational prompts.

At least twice a month home visits are made to reinforce instructional goals and teach parents to assist their children to generalize learned skills to a variety of settings.

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### **Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**General Provisions, Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Facility Requirements, Programs and Services** and **Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the Somerset Hills Learning Institute during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

### **Section III: Staff Requirements**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills Learning Institute accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding appropriate supervision of physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office and having an approved professional development plan.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hill Learning Institute identified concerns in the area regarding criminal history verification for staff members. The Somerset Learning Institute's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a review of policies and staff interviews indicated that the receiving school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area regarding certified/licensed staff.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Certified/Licensed Staff** - During the on-site visit through staff interviews and record reviews it was determined that related services, which are infused in the curriculum, are not delivered or overseen by appropriately certified staff.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school provides related services using appropriately certified therapists. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills Learning Institute accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP meetings conducted at least annually, IEP meetings conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP meetings conducted with students age 14 and older, signatures of participants present on IEPs, receipt of 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 and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components and implementation of IEP components.

### **Area of Need:**

**Communication to Sending District Regarding Missing IEP Components–** During the on-site visit, through staff interviews and record reviews it was determined that the school does not communicate with sending districts when goals and objectives for related services are missing from IEPs.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school communicates with sending districts when IEPs are missing components, including but not limited to goals and objective for related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Implementation of IEP Components Regarding Related Services-** During the on-site visit through staff interviews and record reviews it was determined that although the level of related services provided to students seems extensive, there is no accountability for determining whether the minimum IEP requirements for frequency and duration are being met.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school provides related services in accordance with IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section VI: Discipline**

#### **Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment, the Somerset Hills Learning Institute accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures, procedures for time out rooms, restraints and aversives, removal of a student pending mediation and due process, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process and removal of a student to interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hills Learning Institute identified concerns in the areas regarding the lack of procedures to suspend or terminate a student's placement. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 Somerset Hill Learning Institute on June 7 and 8, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Somerset Hill Learning Institute'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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the receiving school was able to identify nearly all areas 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.

### **Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**General Provisions, Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Facility Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the Somerset Hills Learning Institute during self-assessment and by the NJDOE during the on-site visit.

Additional areas identified as consistently compliant by the Somerset Hill Learning Institute during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included appropriate supervision of physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, having an approved professional development plan, 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, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives, 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 and removal of student to interim alternative educational setting.

During the self-assessment process, the Somerset Hill Learning Institute identified areas of need regarding criminal history verification and procedures for suspensions/terminations of students' placement.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding certified/licensed staff, communication to sending district regarding missing IEP components and implementation of IEP components regarding related services.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Somerset Hill Learning Institute 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.