

## **New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring**

**District:** Hammonton School District

**County:** Atlantic

**Monitoring Dates:** April 19 - 21, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin, and Jane Marano

### ***Background Information:***

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Hammonton School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hammonton School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

The self-assessment was designed to permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Hammonton School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) 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.

As the first step in the monitoring activities, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Hammonton Middle School on the evening of April 6, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the on-site monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the OSEP team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel, and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's chief school administrator, principals, special education director, child study team, general education and special education teachers, and related services providers.

### ***Data Summary:***

In 2004, the Hammonton School District's classification rate for students requiring special education and related services was 22.1%. This is above the state average of 14.6%. Although only 14.9% of those students classified as eligible for special education and related services were educated in general education classes more than 80% of the day, a total of 47.7% were educated in general education classes from 40-80% of the

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school day. The district identified concerns regarding the number of high school students in out-of-district programs. These concerns have been addressed through the district's improvement plan.

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

**Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Program and Services** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during the self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

### ***Section I: General Provision***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of policies and procedures, and dissemination of IDEA information.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### ***Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of transfer students and teacher certification.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of oversight of IEP implementation and provision of counseling services. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding consideration of extended school year services, provision of speech-language services, and length of school day.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Consideration of Extended School Year** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the IEP team does not consider extended school year services for every student determined eligible for special education and related services or eligible for speech and language services. In addition, for those students who are found in need of extended year services, IEPs do not include a description of the services needed, goals and objectives, implementation dates, and frequency, duration, and location of services. As a result, review of a student's IEP by a parent, case manager, teacher, related

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service provider or administrator would not provide a clear understanding of the service(s) required.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the consideration of extended school year services for all classified students and when appropriate, the provision of an extended year program. These activities will result in the consideration of regression/recoupment issues for all classified students as well as any other factors that may impact a student's level of academic performance. Additionally, IEPs must include criteria used to determine the need for extended year services, a description of services needed, goals and objectives, implementation dates, and frequency, duration and location services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students receive extended school year services when appropriate.**

**Implementation Dates, Frequency, Location, and Duration of Speech/Language Services** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the district does not consistently document the implementation dates, frequency, location, and duration of speech/language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs identify the implementation date, frequency, location and duration of speech/language services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully informed of the extent that students are removed from general education classes.**

**Length of School Day** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district offers shortened school day programs for specific special class programs, PRIDE and Up for Life, at the high school. The need for shortened school day programs is not individually determined or documented in IEPs for students attending these programs. As a result, parents may be unaware of the modified length of school day.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that individual decisions are made with regard to the need for shortened school days and documented in IEPs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure that any reduction in the length of the school day is based on a student's individual need.**

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### **Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, provision of notice of a meeting, content and provision of written notice, and independent evaluations.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of written notice in native language. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this activity.** The district also identified an area of need regarding notice of a meeting when the purpose includes transition. However, during the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that all notices of meetings (initial, eligibility, initial IEP, reevaluation, and annual review for students under the age of 14) do not contain the required components. **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the child study team provides notice of a meeting, containing all of the required components, to all students and the improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. It is recommended the district adopts the notices developed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).**

### **Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals by parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of Child Find in native languages. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summary, vision and hearing screenings.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Health Summaries and Vision and Hearing Screenings** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the school nurse does not conduct vision and hearing screenings nor does she summarize health and medical information for students referred to the child study team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that for every student referred to the child study team for an initial evaluation, the school nurse summarizes all available health and medical information, and conducts vision and hearing screenings. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities.**

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**Implementation of these activities will result in the child study team having the necessary information prior to the initial evaluation planning meeting to identify suspected areas of disabilities and to determine assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations.**

### ***Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, speech-language evaluations, and written reports.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of acceptance or rejection of reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this activity.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the components of functional assessments at the high school.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Components of Functional Assessment** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that the child study team does not include the required components of a functional assessment in their evaluation reports. The structured observation in other than a testing session was missing from the functional assessment for high school students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the evaluators include all required components of functional assessments in their reports. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on all required data obtained through the assessment process.**

### ***Section VI: Reevaluation***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of reevaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, and reevaluations for students turning age five.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation of consent to reevaluate.

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### **Areas of Need:**

**Implementation of Consent to Reevaluate (Undue Delay)** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined for those students where it is determined that additional assessments are needed to determine continued eligibility, the district obtains consent to reevaluate but does not conduct assessments until many months later. There is a significant gap between the decision to reevaluate and the actual determination of continued eligibility. As such, the data reviewed at the reevaluation planning meeting is no longer current.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that upon receipt of consent to reevaluate, the district will, without undue delay, initiate the appropriate assessments and conduct an eligibility meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the activities. Implementation of these activities will ensure that eligibility decisions are based on current existing data and, if appropriate, new assessment information.**

### ***Section VII: Eligibility***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of eligibility meeting, participants, criteria, and statement of eligibility.

During self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to the eligibility meeting and signatures of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### ***Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of IEP to parents, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and 90 day timelines.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP participants, meetings (including meetings to revise IEP), IEP components (Core Content Curriculum Standards), and teachers having knowledge of and access to IEPs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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### **Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, and general education access for preschool students, elementary and middle school students.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding decision-making process and continuum for high school students with emotional disabilities. In addition, notification and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students were identified as areas of need. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

### **Section X: Transition to Preschool**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and implementation of IEPs by age 3.

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

### **Section X: Transition to Post-School**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of documentation of courses of study, statement of transition services needs (beginning at age 14), and statement of needed transition services (beginning at age 16).

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding student and agency invitation to transition meeting, procedures for conducting individual assessments, post-secondary liaison, activities and goals related to desired outcomes, and monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by outside agencies. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

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### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled, notification of removal to case manager, suspension tracking, and procedures for placement in interim alternative education settings.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding manifestation determinations, and behavioral intervention plans. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

### **Section XV: Student Records**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of maintenance and destruction of student records.

During self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding documentation of access to records. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, they were able to demonstrate that it has already brought 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 Hammonton School District on April 19-21, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is commended for the areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

At a public focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed concerns regarding lack of communication from the child study team, lack of related services, and inappropriate placements. Many of the issues addressed during the focus meeting have been addressed in the district's improvement plan.

A review of data indicated that the Hammonton School District's classification rate of students requiring special education and related services is well above the state average. Although less than 15 % of school aged students with disabilities are in general education classes more than 80% of the school day, a total of 47.7% are in general education classes from 40-80% of the day. The district identified an issue regarding continuum at the high school level and has written an improvement plan to address this issue.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit by the Office of Special Education Programs included Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Program and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, transfer students, teacher certification, surrogate parents, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, speech/language evaluations, written evaluation reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations for students turning age 5, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, provision of IEP to parents, implementation dates of IEP, annual reviews timelines, 90 day timelines, LRE considerations and documentations, supplementary aids and services, general education access, preschool transition planning conferences, implementation of IEP by age 3, documentation of courses of study, statement of transition services needs (beginning at age 14), and statement of needed transition services (beginning at age 16), procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled, notification of removal to case manager, suspension tracking, procedures for placement in interim alternative education settings, and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development and parent training, oversight of IEP implementation, provision of counseling services, written notices, Child Find in native language, documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of evaluation reports, provision of evaluation reports to parents prior to meeting, IEP participants, IEP meetings (including meetings to revise IEP), IEP components (core content curriculum standards), teachers having knowledge

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of and access to IEPs and notification and participation of in non-academic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students. The decision-making process and continuum were identified as areas of need for high school students with emotional disabilities. Other areas of need identified included student and/or agency invitation to transition meeting, procedures for conducting individual assessments, post-secondary liaison, activities and goals related to desired outcomes, monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by outside agencies, manifestation determinations, behavioral intervention plans, and documentation of access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year services, provision of speech/language services, length of school day, health and medical summaries, hearing and vision screenings, components of functional assessment, and implementation of consent to reevaluate.

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