

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

**District:** Mullica Township School District

**County:** Atlantic

**Monitoring Dates:** February 3, 4 and 5, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Julia Harmelin and Kenneth Richards

***Background Information:***

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Mullica Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Mullica Township School District 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 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 identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Mullica Township 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 on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Mullica Township Primary School on January 28, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for developing additional programs that have allowed with students with more severe disabilities to remain in district. This has been accomplished through the use of consultants and assistive technology for individual students.

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The district has also purchased audio-trainers/sound field systems for many of the classes in both the primary and middle schools. These systems have aided both classified and non-classified students by amplifying the teacher's voice in the classroom.

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

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

### ***Section I: General Provisions***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and transfer procedures. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of extended school year because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of transfer procedures because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, related services and transfer students.

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

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that IEPS do not include a program description, implementation dates and duration of program.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs document the projected implementation date, duration and program description for extended school year programs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Transfer Students** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that teachers do not consistently receive current IEPs for students who transfer from one school to another. As a result, it is not possible to implement the IEP in a timely manner.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure teachers are provided with a current IEP for students who transfer into their classrooms. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Related Services** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that IEPs do not consistently document if speech is provided in individual or group settings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure documentation of speech services includes either individual or small group instruction. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of interpreters at meetings, notice of meetings and independent evaluations

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, attempts to secure parental participation, consent, written notice (during summer and to adult student) and notice in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of consent, notice in native language, written notice to adult student and attempts to secure parental participation. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of surrogate parents and the provision of written notice during the summer because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referral, meeting participants and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, referral process, health summary and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of health summary. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of child find activities because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of referral process because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. **The district did not submit an improvement plan to address the area of timelines for identification meetings conducted during the summer. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.**

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations and assessments for students eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports and functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services

**Areas of Need:**

**Written Reports** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that all written reports were signed but not dated. Written reports for students eligible for speech and language services do not include a statement regarding behavior and its relationship to academic functioning.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure all written reports are dated and that written reports for students eligible for speech and language services include all required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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**Functional Assessment** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that evaluations for speech and language services do not consistently include all components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure evaluations for speech and language services include all required components of a functional assessment. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants and criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents and documentation of eligibility. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of evaluation reports to parents because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of the provision of eligibility determinations because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of agreement/disagreement.

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

**Documentation of Agreement/Disagreement** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that team members are not documenting their agreement/disagreement and rationale with eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure team members document their agreement/disagreement for eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP meetings, annual review timelines, Present Level of Educational Performance statements and 90-day timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of a copy of the IEP to parents and adult students, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, and required statements. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of required statements and a provision of a copy of the IEP to parents and adult students because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required change.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants and implementation of IEPs

### **Areas of Need:**

**Meeting Participants** – During the on-site visit it was determined through record review that a special education teacher does not attend IEP meetings for preschoolers who are enrolled in in-class support programs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure a special education teacher attends IEP meetings for preschoolers who are enrolled in in-class support programs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Implementation of IEPs** - During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the preschool in-class support class is staffed by a dually certified teacher who is employed by the district as a regular education teacher. A special education teacher is not assigned to the class.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the preschool in-class support program is staffed by not only a regular education teacher but also a special education teacher who will provide services in accordance with IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual decision-making, continuum, participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities, supplemental aids and services, least restrictive environment documentation and regular education access. Barriers identified by the district include the removal of students from regular education classes because teachers lack the skill and support to implement curriculum and program modifications or to use supplemental aids and services identified in the IEP. As a result, general education options are not always

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considered at IEP meetings. The district also cited a lack of staff to provide in-class support and consultation for academic and behavioral interventions. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of least restrictive environment documentation and participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of supplemental aids and services because it lacks timelines for implementation and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of individual decision-making, continuum and regular education access because it lacks appropriate timelines for its administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition service needs.

No area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool school disabled by age three. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedure.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and procedural safeguards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of

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documentation to case manager. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the areas of manifestation determination, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, interim alternative educational setting and manifestation determination because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about required change.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

### ***Section XIV: Programs and Services***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size, age range, home instruction and group size for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time, case management responsibility, speech and child study team staffing. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of consultation time because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component. **The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address the areas of case management responsibility, child study team and speech staffing because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 access to records, access sheets and documentation of location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of maintenance and destruction of records. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of maintenance and destruction of records because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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 Mullica Township on February 3, 4 and 5, 2003. 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 exceptionally 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 also commended for immediately implementing activities to correct some of the self-identified issues prior to the on-site monitoring. The district is further commended for the many 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 focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents expressed satisfaction with the district's efforts to involve parents and implementation of programs as identified in their children's IEPs. Parents also expressed satisfaction with the progress their children have made and commended the district staff for their support and dedication.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Reevaluation, School to Post School Transition, Statewide Assessment and Graduation.

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, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, interpreters at meetings, notice of meetings, independent evaluations, direct referral, identification meeting participants, vision and hearing screenings, multi disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, assessments for eligible for special education and related services, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, IEP meetings, annual review timelines, Present Level of Educational Performance, 90 day timelines, transition service needs, suspension tracking, class size, age range, home instruction and group size/speech, class size, age range, home instruction, group size/speech access sheets, and documentation of location of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, extended school year and transfer procedures, surrogate parents, attempts to secure parental participation, consent, written notice (during summer and to adult student), notices in native language, child find activities, referral process, health summary, identification meeting timelines, copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of eligibility, copy of IEP to parent and adult student, goals and objectives/core curriculum content standards, required statements, individual decision-making, continuum, participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities, supplemental aids and services, least restrictive environment documentation, regular education access, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool school disable by age three, discipline documentation to case manager, functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, procedural safeguards, consultation time, case management responsibility, speech and child study team staffing and maintenance and destruction of student records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, transfer students, written reports, functional assessments, documentation of agreement/ disagreement, IEP meeting participants and implementation of the IEP,

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