

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

**District:** Asbury Park School District

**County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Dates:** January 3,4, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Stephen Coplin, Debbie Masarsky, Robbie Friedman

**Background Information:**

As an identified high-risk district, Asbury Park School District has been working cooperatively and diligently with staff from the Office of Special Education Programs since July 1999. Prior to the on-site monitoring, the district had undergone a targeted review and subsequently developed an improvement plan. The monitors have worked with the district to implement this improvement plan as well as provide technical assistance for completing the self-assessment and develop district procedures.

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Asbury Park School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Asbury Park 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 Asbury Park School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members on November 14, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

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### **District Strengths:**

#### **The district provides the following unique programs/services for students with disabilities:**

“The Adopt a Class” program ensures that each child study team member and each related service provider works with a special education class that needs some additional support. They visit their adopted classes and lend assistance for 30 minutes at least twice per month to provide support to teachers and assist students.

“The Café Project” offers cognitively impaired students at the high school instruction in the areas of life skills, social skills and job skills. Students are responsible for preparing meals, serving meals, money management issues and the marketing of products created in their café.

“The Pregnant Moms’ Project” provides special education students with counseling and educational services during their pregnancy and after the birth of their babies. The children are placed in district day-care centers to allow students to continue their education within their district’s schools.

“School-Based Youth Services” was initiated to help special education students navigate adolescent years, complete their education, obtain skills leading to employment and graduate drug free. It provides special education students with emergency counseling, family counseling, job-coaching, after hours recreation activities, tutoring services, health services and substance abuse counseling/preventive programs.

“The Holiday School Project” encourages classified students to interact socially with their peers when selling their homemade gifts during the holiday season. The profits from this project are used to purchase materials for the classroom.

“The Special Education and Parents in Asbury Program (SEPIA)” was created for special educators and parents to develop a collaborative working relationship in which parents feel comfortable expressing their concerns about special education issues in the district. The program also provides instruction for the parents of special education students through workshops, panel discussions and provision of strategies and materials that parents may use at home to better prepare students for a successful school experience.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies/procedures and public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with in-service training. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness

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of this staff development. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

### **Section II: FAPE**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, certifications and extended school year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with facilities, inclusion of students with non-disabled peers, provision of programs and services, goals/objectives for related services and transfer procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent and content of notices for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with surrogate parents, provision of notice of a meeting, 15-day timeline, provision of notices in native language, required participants at all meetings and independent evaluations. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding content of notices.

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

**Content of Notices** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the district has adopted state notices for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS), the notices for students determined eligible for speech/language services (ESLS) do not contain the required components/statements.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all district notices contain required statements and components. The improvement plan must also include an oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt all of the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals and hearing/vision screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with Child Find activities, PAC/pre-referral procedures, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timeline for convening identification meetings and health summaries. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Section V: Evaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with evaluations in native language and acceptance/rejection of all or parts of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding functional assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations and written reports.

**Areas of Need:**

**Functional Assessments** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that functional assessments do not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments contain the required components. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Multidisciplinary Evaluations for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that a statement regarding the educational impact is not included in the report.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that multidisciplinary evaluations include the written educational impact statement. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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**Written Reports** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that written reports are not dated.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are dated. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section VI.   Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of conducting reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> for students turning 5 years of age.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with reevaluation timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

### **Section VII.   Eligibility**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with eligibility criteria for speech services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding provision of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility criteria and criteria statements.

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

**Documentation of Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with parents and staff that although parents are provided with copies of evaluation reports at least ten days prior to the eligibility meeting, the district does not document this provision.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the documentation of the provision of evaluation reports to parents in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Eligibility Criteria Issues** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined that although the IEP teams discuss the proposed eligibility category, the district has not adopted a severe discrepancy formula. It was further determined the district does not document the eligibility statement in the student files for any eligibility criteria.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a statistical formula/criteria for determining severe discrepancy for the category of SLD is adopted. The plan must also ensure the district documents the appropriate eligibility criteria assigned to students and provides parents with the statement of eligibility. The plan must further include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Section VIII: Individualized Education Program**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation dates and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with 30 and 90 day timelines, provision of IEPs to parents, IEP implementation, informing teachers of their responsibilities related to IEPs, observation of proposed placements, considerations and required statements, alignment of goals/objectives with CCCS and annual reviews. The improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that although the district has already demonstrated some improvement in the areas identified during self-assessment, at the high school level, present levels of educational performance (PLEPs) were lacking, LRE statements did not document the consideration of supplementary aids and services in the regular education setting and goals/objectives were not individualized. The district revised the improvement plan during the on-site visit that is sufficient to address this area of need.

**Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with individualized decision-making, LRE statements, considerations and required statements, participation with non-disabled peers, annual placement decisions and supplementary aids and services. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of courses of study.

During self-assessment the district identified concerns with student and agency invitations, post-secondary liaison, statement of transition service needs, statement of needed transition services, consideration of students' interests and preferences, agency failure to provide transition services, agency failure to send representatives and DVR consultation. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Section X: Transition from Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preschool transition planning conference and transition to pre-school by age 3.

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

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary Of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with notification to case managers, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, and procedural safeguards for students identified as potentially disabled. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

**Section XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding participation, accommodations/modifications and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern with child study team members having knowledge regarding the content of statewide assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding IEP documentation of rationale for exemption from participation in statewide assessments and documentation of alternate assessments.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Rationale for Exemption from Participation in Statewide Assessment** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that IEPs did not contain a rationale for exemption from participation in statewide assessment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs contain a rationale for exemption from participation in statewide assessments. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

**Alternate Assessment** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not have procedures to ensure that students who are exempt from participating in statewide assessments, participate in an alternate assessment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students who are exempted from participating in the statewide assessment program participate in the alternate assessment program (APA) as indicated in the August 1, 2001 memo issued by the Office of Special Education Programs. The district personnel must identify, as soon as possible, students who have been exempt from participating in statewide assessments, provide in-service training and begin the assessment process immediately.**

### **Section XIII: Graduation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of diplomas.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with notification to out-of-district students of graduation activities/exercises. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding written notice of graduation and IEP documentation of exemption from graduation requirements.



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### **Areas of Need:**

**Notification of Graduation** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not provide written notice of graduation to students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students are provided with notice of graduation and that the provision is documented in student files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the written notice of graduation developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

**Documentation of Graduation Requirements** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the Graduation Requirements section of IEPs did not contain a rationale for exemption from passing the HSPA in order to graduate.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs contain a rationale for exemption from passing statewide assessments (HSPA). The improvement plan must also include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district use the IEP format developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and complete all of the required components.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class/group size and age range.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with employment of sufficient staff, case management, consultation time, support requirements, elementary pull-out resource programs, teacher assignments, team-teaching model, supplementary instruction, special class programs/description/instruction and home instruction. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with access sheets, location of other records and maintenance and destruction. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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**SUMMARY**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Asbury Park School District on January 3, 4, 2002. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to self-identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revisions, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were 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, the three parents that attended expressed satisfaction with district reading programs. They also expressed concerns regarding communication between case managers and parents and the lack of textbooks their children can bring home to use for homework.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, length of school day/year, certifications, extended school year, consent, direct referrals, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, IEP implementation dates, age of majority, continuum of programs, transition to preschool, participation in the statewide assessment process, class/group size and age range.

As a result of the joint effects of the district staff and oversight monitors, progress has been noted in such areas as development of district-wide procedures, timelines, IEP development at the elementary/middle school levels, goals/objectives for related services and class/group sizes.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, related services, transfer procedures, facilities, surrogate parents, provision of notice of a meeting, native language, required participants at all meetings, independent evaluations, timelines, Child Find activities, referral process/pre-referral interventions, health summary, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, eligibility criteria for speech/language services, IEP considerations/required statements, goals/objectives related to Core Content Curriculum Standards, teacher access to IEPs, individualized-decision-making, least restrictive environment statement, post-school transition, discipline procedures, child study team knowledge of statewide assessment content, notification to out-of-district students regarding graduation, staffing, home instruction and student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notices for speech/language services, written reports, functional assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations, reports to parents, eligibility criteria/statement and IEP documentation for statewide assessment and the APA, Written Notice of Graduation, and documentation of graduation requirements.

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Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.