

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

**District:** Audubon School District

**County:** Camden

**Monitoring Dates:** September 24 and 25, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Patricia Fair and Julia Harmelin

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Audubon School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Audubon 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 Audubon 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 Audubon High School library on September 24, 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 provides an in-district inclusive preschool program for three and four year olds, a summer recreational program for preschool disabled students, and a Learn-To-Swim Program for preschool disabled students at the YMCA. A summer computer lab workshop/assistive technology for elementary special education students is also provided.

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

The district provides a high school summer school program for special education students and an overnight team building program at Camp Ockanickon in Medford Lakes, NJ, for high school special education students.

The district also houses the Audubon Professional Development Institute, an after-school enrichment program for staff development, as well as a CST/Department of Special Education Lending Library for staff, parents, and students.

### **Data Summary:**

The Audubon School District reported a classification rate of 12.7% for the 2001-2002 school year, which is below the state average of 13.4%. The data submitted by the district indicated that placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average since 23.5% of these students are placed in settings that do not offer access to general education. For students ages 6-21, the district identified a need to increase access to general education, although during the 2002-2003 school year, 46% of students eligible for special education and related services were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. It should be noted that since the 2000-2001 school year, the Audubon School District has increased the number of students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day by 8.5%. In addition, 100% of the district's special education students participate in statewide assessment.

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

**Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Student Records** 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 area of professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

### **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 and year, transfer students, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, certifications, and provision of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and documentation of related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, direct referral for parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process, health summary, and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of copies of speech and language evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented.** The district further identified concerns in the area of signatures of agreement and disagreement for speech and language eligibility determinations. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants, age of majority, annual review timelines, and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, and implementation dates. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns in the area of teacher knowledge and access. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area 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.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Oberti, considerations and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, and continuum. The district has identified constraints such as limited staff, scheduling conflicts, additional training needs, and insufficient staff to address behavior/academic concerns. It should be noted that a new staff request was denied for the 03-04 school year. An appeal has been made for the 04-05 school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional 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 themselves compliant in the areas of student/agency invitation, agency involvement, and age 16 needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, and preferences and interests. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, and functional behavioral assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of interim alternative educational settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding manifestation determination meetings.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Manifestation Determination Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined that when a student is suspended for more than ten days, the district is holding informal meetings to determine the appropriate action. The parent and case manager are the only participants at this meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that manifestation determination meetings are held for students with disabilities prior to the eleventh day of suspension. These activities will further ensure all required participants are in attendance at this meeting and that documentation is maintained regarding all decisions made as a result of the meeting. The implementation of these activities will ensure student rights are safeguarded and services continue during the period of time the student is removed from program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### **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, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, and schedules.

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

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

# New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Audubon School District on September 24 and 25, 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 this review the district was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. Additionally, the district is 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.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in general education for more than 80% of the school day. Additionally, the data submitted by the district indicated a need to increase access to general education for preschool students and for students ages 6-21.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Students are receiving programs and services as mandated by their IEPs, communication is excellent between parents and staff, specifically child study teams and teachers. Parents expressed satisfaction with both preschool and high school programs.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring included Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Student Records.

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 day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, oversight of IEP implementation, provision of programs, child find ages 3-21, direct referral for parents and staff, summer referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, eligibility meetings and participants, eligibility criteria, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, Oberti, LRE considerations and documentation, student/agency invitation, agency involvement, age 16 needed transition services, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, and schedules.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, extended school year, documentation of related services, referral process, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, provision of copies of speech and language evaluation reports to parents ten days prior, signatures of agreement and disagreement for speech and language eligibility meetings, IEP considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, teacher knowledge and access, individualized decision-making, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, interim alternative educational settings, and consultation time

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

The on-site visit identified one additional area of need within the various standards regarding manifestation determination meetings.

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