

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

**District:** Branchburg School District

**County:** Somerset

**Monitoring Dates:** May 6, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Deborah Masarsky

***Background Information:***

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Branchburg School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Branchburg School District** with an opportunity to evaluate 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 **Branchburg School District** developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a comprehensive review of student files, district's policies and procedures, interviewed the director, supervisor, child study team members, speech therapists and parents and held a public focus group meeting for parents/community members at the **Branchburg's Central Middle School** on June 13, 2005 to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan. Based on these activities, a determination was made by staff from the Office of Special Education Programs that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan that will appropriately address all areas of need identified during that process.

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### ***District Strengths:***

The district is commended for the ***Before and After*** program that involves middle school students with disabilities. Students participate in this program voluntarily to receive assistance with homework and study skills either before or after school hours. Additionally, the district's ***Challenge Program***, established and supervised by the Branchburg Township Board of Education police department and Township Committee, provides athletic activities for students with physical and cognitive challenges. This program provides opportunities to develop self-esteem through teamwork, sportsmanship and fair play.

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

A review of the district's data from 2001-2004 indicates a reduction of the district's classification rate from 12.5% in 2003 to 11.6% in 2004. These rates are below the state averages for those years. Although only 7 of 43 (16.3%) preschool students with disabilities were placed in integrated programs in 2003, during the 2004-2005 school year, the district increased the number to 16 students of a total of 39 (41%).

The district's data also indicated that in 2003, 74% of classified students aged 6-21 were educated for more than 80% of the day in general education programs. Furthermore, the district currently exceeds New Jersey percentages for placement of 19% of their students in general education classes for more than 40% of their day. Finally, in an effort to educate as many students as possible with their typical peers, only 6% of students with disabilities are educated in programs outside of the district.

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

**Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, and Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment process and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the monitoring process.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of parent training. The district has begun to implement the improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of programs and related services, goals and objectives for related services, transfer students, length of school day/year, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process regarding documentation related services and resource programs in students' IEPs.

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

**Documentation of Related Services** - During the monitoring process, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the duration and location of speech therapy is not consistently documented appropriately in students' IEPs. Instead, documentation of this service indicates "in and out of class combination" without delineating the conditions under which speech services will be provided in the classroom and when they will be provided in the speech room. Additionally, occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) consultation is mistakenly documented as a related service.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure documentation of the speech-language services will include the frequency, duration, and location of services. If services are provided in the classroom and in the speech room, the IEP should delineate the specific frequency, location and duration for each location or the condition under which the locations would be used. If group size will be smaller than 5, the specific group size should be indicated. and, either *group* or *individual* provision of speech services. Additionally, the plan will include procedures to ensure that only direct OT and PT services are documented within the related service section of students' IEPs. Finally, the plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities. As a result, parents will be fully informed of the actual planned services, thereby providing them the opportunity to fully understand the actions to which they are consenting and/or to exercise their due process rights.**

**Documentation of Resource Programs** - During the monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not consistently document whether resource programs will be provided as in-class support or pull-out resource programs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs document the location of resource programs as either in-class support services, including the duration that the special education teacher spends in the class, or, pullout resource program. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative**

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**oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. As a result of these activities, parents will be fully informed of the nature of the special education program to be provided.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notices in native language, independent evaluations, and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the monitoring process regarding content and provision of notices.

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

**Content/Provision of Notices** – During monitoring process it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members and speech-language specialists that the district's notices do not contain the required components and that notices are not consistently provided to parents as required by regulations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all district notices contain the required components and that the district provides notice of a meeting and written notice as required by code. The district may refer to the sample notices developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, available on the web at [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education). The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. As a result of these activities, the district will ensure that parents have the opportunity to fully participate in the decision-making process, including the opportunity to exercise their due process rights.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of identification meetings with required participants convened within the 20-day timeline.

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

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Additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process regarding the direct parent and staff referrals and pre-referral interventions.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Direct Parent and Staff Referrals** – During monitoring process, it was determined through review of the district's *Department of Student Services Guide* (Special Education Procedures), record review, and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not have a procedure for parents and staff to make direct referrals to the child study team for evaluation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents and staff are provided the opportunity to make a direct referral to the child study team for evaluation. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Documentation of the Effectiveness of Pre-referral Interventions** - It was determined that although the district's intervention and referral service (I&RS) team develops pre-referral interventions for students, the effectiveness of those interventions attempted by the classroom teacher are not sufficiently documented.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers evaluate and document the effectiveness of the pre-referral interventions implemented in the general education setting. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component. These activities will ensure that attempts are made to provide supports to the student in general education prior to referral to the child study team.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, multidisciplinary evaluations, and bilingual evaluations.

Additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process regarding development of written reports by speech-language specialists, functional assessment, and signed and dated reports.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Speech-Language Evaluation Reports** – During monitoring it was determined through record review and an interview with the speech-language specialist, that although the speech-language specialist includes the educational impact statement from the classroom teacher as part of an evaluation summary, the report does not contain all of the requirements of a written evaluation report as stipulated in NJAC 6A:14- 3.4(d).

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that following completion of their evaluation, speech-language specialists develop written reports that contain the required components. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities. As a result of these activities, the appropriate information from the evaluation will be available for determining eligibility.**

**Components of Functional Assessment** – During monitoring it was determined through record review, and staff interviews that interventions attempted by the classroom teacher are not consistently included as a required component of the functional assessment in evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluators include all required components of functional assessment in their reports. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities. As a result of these activities eligibility determinations will be 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 planning meetings with required participants and reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of three year reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliance in the area of convening of eligibility conferences with required participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations, provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference and provision of parental notice of eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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An additional area of need was identified during the monitoring process regarding the statement of eligibility *for Specific Learning Disability (SLD)*.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability** - During monitoring it was determined that the district does not include the specific area(s) of discrepancy when documenting the Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the specific area(s) of discrepancy is included when documenting the Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. As a result of these activities, parents will be informed of the criteria used to determine their child's eligibility for special education and related services under the category of specific learning disability.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting participants, present levels of educational performance statements (PLEPS), goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates on IEPs, 90-day and annual review timelines, and the provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of considerations and required statements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process regarding *Age of Majority* and teacher knowledge of responsibility to implement IEPs.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Age of Majority** – During monitoring process it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not discuss transfer of rights or include the *Age of Majority* statement in IEPs at least three years prior to the year in which the student will reach age 18.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan, to include activities to ensure that the *Age of Majority* statement with the accompanying rights that will transfer when the student turns 18 be discussed and included in IEPs at least three years prior to reaching age of majority. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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**Teacher Knowledge of Responsibility to Implement IEPs** - During monitoring process it was determined through record review and interviews with the director, child study team members, and parents that the district does not have a procedure to ensure that regular and special education teachers are informed of their educational responsibility to provide the supports and services required by IEPs.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan, to include activities to ensure that all teachers understand their educational responsibilities to provide supports and services as documented in students' IEPs. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. As a result, teachers will assume responsibility in implementing their students' IEPs. This will provide students with the opportunity to benefit from instruction in both special and general education programs.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of regular education access within the district and notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic and extracurricular activities available within district

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual decision-making, consideration and documentation of supplementary aids and services, integrated preschool opportunities and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

### ***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 IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age 3.

No additional areas of need were identified during the monitoring process.

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

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

An area of need was identified during the monitoring process regarding the completion of the transition service needs statement at age 14.



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### Area(s) of Need:

**Post-Secondary Transition Issues** - During monitoring process it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not consistently complete of the *Statement of Transition Service Need* beginning at age 14 (or younger if appropriate).

- The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEP teams convene post-secondary transition meetings for students age 14 or younger; provide parent(s), student and appropriate agencies with invitations to IEP team meetings when post-secondary transition will be discussed; align courses of study with each student's interests and preferences; and accurately documents decisions in each IEP. The IEP developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, available at [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education), includes the required documentation. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. As a result of these activities the appropriate people will be able to participate in decision making regarding post-school outcomes considering interests and preferences identified.

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

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliance in the areas of age range, group size for related services, home instruction, and consultation time.

An area of need was identified during the monitoring process regarding the class size for resource programs.

#### Area(s) of Need:

**Class Size** - During monitoring process, it was determined through record review and interviews with the director and child study team members that the district does not consistently comply with class size limits for resource programs as required by state regulations.

- The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all class sizes are within required limits. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities. As a result, the district can more effectively implement programs and services in an environment where the students have the opportunity to derive full educational benefit.

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### Summary

Special education monitoring was conducted in the **Branchburg School District** on May 6, 2005. The purpose 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 areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs to be compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of the district's data indicates a slight reduction of the district's classification rate from 12.5% in 2003 to 11.6% in 2004. These rates are below the state averages for both years. Although only 7 of 43 (16.3%) preschool students with disabilities were placed in integrated programs in 2003, during the 2004-2005 school year, the district increased the number to 16 students of 39 (41%).

The district's data also indicated that in 2003, 74% of classified students aged 6-21 were educated for more than 80% of the day in general education programs. Furthermore, the district currently exceeds New Jersey percentages for placement of 19% of their students in general education classes for more than 40% of their day. Finally, in an effort to educate as many students as possible with their typical peers, only 6% of students with disabilities are educated in programs outside of the district.

At a focus group meeting where twenty parents attended, most expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and communication between themselves and staff. However, other parents expressed concerns with district testing, the need for more measurable classroom assessments to determine students' progress, and for teachers to be informed of their educational responsibility to provide the supports and services required by IEPs in order to meet the individual needs of students. The majority of the parents agreed that further staff training would improve the education of their children. Parents suggested that the district provide more in-class support opportunities for higher level classes, and that general education teachers implement more effective teaching strategies for their special education students. Others commented on the need for parents to do their own research into new and different special education programs that will help their children succeed. The inclusion of classified students in the district's sports program was an area that parents found to be most positive. During the self-assessment and monitoring processes, many of these concerns have been determined to be areas of need for which the district must implement appropriate improvement plans.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the monitoring visit included policies and procedures; dissemination of public information; provision of programs and related services; goals/objectives for related services; transfer students; length of school day and year; facilities; certification; consent; notices in native language; interpreters; independent evaluations; identification meetings with required participants convened within the 20-day timeline; standardized assessments; multidisciplinary evaluations; bilingual evaluations; reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool; convening of eligibility determinations conferences with required participants, PLEPS; goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards; IEP implementation dates; provision of IEPs to

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parents; annual review and 90-day timelines; regular education access; notification to out-of-district students of non-academic and extra-curricular activities within district; preschool transition planning conferences; IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three; notification of suspension to the case manager; suspension tracking; manifestation determination meetings; functional behavioral assessments; behavior intervention plans; interim alternative educational settings, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students; statewide assessment participation; approved accommodations/modifications for statewide assessment; IEP statewide assessment documentation; alternate proficiency assessments; age range; group size; home instruction; consultation time for special and regular education teachers; access/requests for student records, and documentation of other locations of student records in the central file.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent training; extended school year; surrogate parents; child find activities; health and medical summary; vision and hearing screenings; reevaluation timelines; documentation of agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations; provision of evaluation reports to parents at least ten day prior to the eligibility conference; provision of parental notice of eligibility; considerations and required statements of IEPs; individual decision-making (consideration and documentation of supplementary aids and services); integrated preschool opportunities 3 year-old students with disabilities; and continuum of programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding staff training; documentation of related services; documentation of specific resource programs; the frequency and duration of provision of in-class support services; content and provision of notices; direct referrals; documentation of effectiveness of pre-referral interventions; written evaluation reports; components of the functional assessment; statement of eligibility for *Specific Learning Disability*; IEP components; age of majority; teacher knowledge/responsibility to implement IEPs; post-secondary transition; and class size for resource programs.

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