

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

**District:** Chester Township School District

**County:** Morris

**Monitoring Dates:** February 8, 2006

**Monitoring Team:** Nicole Buten & Vanessa Leonard

### **Background Information:**

During the 2004–2005 school year, the Chester 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 Chester Township 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 Chester 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.

During the on-site visit, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers and related service personnel and other relevant information. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator and child study team members. Parents of students with disabilities were interviewed by telephone.

### **Data Summary:**

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 67% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state average of 41.6% for that year. Additionally, the district has been able to educate the vast majority of students with disabilities within the district. Only 3.9% of students with disabilities attended school in separate special education private or public schools compared to the state average of 9.6%. For students ages 3 to 5, only one child (of 22 preschoolers with disabilities) was educated in a general education setting during the same year although no findings of noncompliance were made in this area. Two

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preschool students with disabilities (of 22) were educated in a combination of general and special education settings and five preschool students attended private schools for students with disabilities.

A three year review of the classification rate data for the district shows a consistent positive trend. The district classification rate in 2002 was 12.24%, 11.98% in 2003 and 11.2% in 2004. These rates were lower than New Jersey’s statewide classification rate for each year. Based upon information obtained from district personnel and document review, the district has been able to maintain a consistently low classification rate by prioritizing staff training with regard to effective interventions in the general education setting and by assuring oversight and support in the area of implementation of instructional strategies and adaptations.

**Standards not Applicable:**

Written notice of graduation was not reviewed by the NJDOE because the district does not serve a population of students for which this regulation applies.

**Sections Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards**

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the NJDOE during the monitoring process as compliant:

- **General Provisions**
- **Free, Appropriate Public Education**
- **Location, Referral and Identification (LRI)**
- **Evaluation**
- **Reevaluation**
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**
- **Transition to Preschool**
- **Transition to Adult Life**
- **Discipline**
- **Statewide Assessments**
- **Programs & Services**

**Areas Demonstrating Compliance**

The following areas, within the 15 sections reviewed, were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee and by the Department of Education as compliant. These areas were reviewed for students eligible for special education and related services (ESERS) and students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS). Areas compliant for only one group of students are noted.

<b>Section</b>	<b>Areas Demonstrating Compliance</b>
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent</li> <li>• Implementation without undue delay</li> <li>• Provision of notice of a meeting</li> <li>• Content of notice of a meeting</li> </ul>

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<b>Section</b>	<b>Areas Demonstrating Compliance</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Provision of written notice</li> <li>• Content of written notice</li> <li>• Interpreters at meeting</li> <li>• Independent evaluations</li> </ul>
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting participants</li> <li>• Eligibility criteria</li> <li>• Signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale</li> <li>• Statement of eligibility (Specific Learning Disability)</li> </ul>
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting participants</li> <li>• IEP required considerations and components</li> <li>• Implementation dates</li> <li>• IEP provided to the parent prior to implementation</li> <li>• Meetings held annually, or more often if necessary, to review and revise the IEP</li> <li>• Teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge and/or access to IEPs)</li> <li>• Annual reviews completed by June 30</li> <li>• 90-day timelines</li> </ul>
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEP requirements</li> <li>• Out-of-district student participation</li> </ul>

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**Areas of Noncompliance – Improvement Plan Review**

The following areas were identified by the district’s self-assessment committee as noncompliant. The NJOSEP has verified that the district has developed and implemented an improvement plan that has corrected the non-compliance.

<b>Section</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Plan Is Sufficient</b>	<b>Plan Needs Revision</b>	<b>Implemented and the district has demonstrated compliance</b>
Procedural Safeguards	<b>Notices in Native Language-</b> Letters inviting parents to meetings and written notice were not translated consistently for parents who speak another language.			<b>X</b>
Eligibility	<b>Copy of evaluation reports to parents-</b> The evaluation reports were not always provided to the parent 10 days prior to an eligibility meeting.			<b>X</b>
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	<b>Classroom observations-</b> Parents were not given the opportunity to observe a proposed educational placement prior to implementation of the IEP.			<b>X</b>

***Additional Areas of Need***

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

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### ***Summary***

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Chester Township School District on February 8, 2006. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district identified all areas of need and developed and implemented an improvement plan that corrected the areas of non-compliance. 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.

A review of the district's data for students with disabilities indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, the district educated 67% of students with disabilities in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day. This rate was significantly higher than the state average of 41.6% for that year. Additionally, the district has been able to educate the vast majority of students with disabilities within the district. Only 3.9% of students with disabilities attended school in separate special education private or public schools compared to the state average of 9.6%. For students ages 3 to 5, only one child (of 22 preschoolers with disabilities) was educated in a general education setting during the same year although no findings of noncompliance were made in this area. Two preschool students with disabilities (of 22) were educated in a combination of general and special education settings and five preschool students attended private schools for students with disabilities.

A three year review of the classification rate data for the district shows a consistent positive trend. The district classification rate in 2002 was 12.24%, 11.98% in 2003 and 11.2% in 2004. These rates were lower than New Jersey's statewide classification rate for each year. Based upon information obtained from district personnel and document review, the district has been able to maintain a consistently low classification rate by prioritizing staff training with regard to effective interventions in the general education setting and by assuring oversight and support in the area of implementation of instructional strategies and adaptations.

During interviews conducted with parents by phone, all parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's program options, educational opportunities and staff. Parents receive written invitations to meetings and the district makes efforts to accommodate parents' schedules when arranging meetings. Parents also reported frequent contact with teachers and child study team case managers.

The self-assessment process required the district to review implementation of federal and state regulations categorized into 15 sections. Within each section, a number of areas were reviewed. The on-site monitoring visit involved verification that the sections and areas identified as compliant by the district in their self-assessment were compliant with regulations. These sections were identified by the district during self-assessment and the New Jersey Department of Education during the monitoring process as compliant: General Provisions, Free, Appropriate Public Education, Location, Referral and Identification, Evaluation, Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Transition to Preschool and Adult Life, Discipline, Statewide Assessment and Programs and Services.

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Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included: consent, implementation without undue delay, provision of a notice of a meeting, content of a notice of a meeting, meetings, provision of written notice, content of written notice, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, eligibility meeting participants, eligibility criteria, signature of agreement and/or disagreement and rationale, statement of eligibility (specific learning disability), IEP meeting participants, IEP required considerations and statements, implementation dates, IEP provided to parent prior to implementation, meetings held annually, or more often if necessary to review and/or revise the IEP, annual reviews completed by June 30, teachers informed of their responsibilities (knowledge and/or access to the IEP) and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding notices in native language, copy of evaluation reports to parents and classroom observations. The district was able to demonstrate through documentation and staff interviews that all areas identified as non-compliant have now been corrected.

As the on-site visit identified no additional areas of need within the various standards, and no revisions to the districts improvement plan are required, the improvement plan submitted in June 2005 is now considered fully implemented. Formal notification of compliance will be forwarded to the Superintendent and Board of Education by the County Superintendent of Schools.