

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

**District:** Chesterfield Township School District      **County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** March 10 & 11, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Michael Lee and Kenneth Richards

***Background Information:***

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Chesterfield 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 Chesterfield 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 Chesterfield 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 Chesterfield Township Elementary School on March 4, 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, superintendent/principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members. Parents of special education students were telephoned at random and interviewed.

***District Strengths:***

The district is commended for the extent to which students with disabilities are included in general education, extracurricular and nonacademic activities. Students with disabilities participate in and benefit from their experiences in activities such as the four-

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day trip to Camp Fairview as part of their environmental education program and the annual science fair that provides a hands-on learning experience for students in the fifth and sixth grades. All students participate in the school's annual play. The instrumental music program for grades three through six has received national recognition from the American Music Conference as one of the Best 100 Communities in America for Music Education in 2002.

The district provides all students with a comprehensive media center and computer lab. The Success-Maker software program has been integrated into the math and literacy curricula. This program consists of an instructional management system that allows students to learn and advance at their own pace. Reports from the special education teachers indicate that Success-Maker offers a writing program that interfaces well with the development and implementation of the goals and objectives of a student's IEP.

Staff volunteer their time to organize the Reading and Writers Workshop and book clubs that reinforce classroom instruction. Further, the district recognizes their Community of Learners Team (COLT) and Teachers Offering Professional Sharing (TOPS) programs as integral features of their commitment to professional development. COLT affords all teachers vertical articulation meetings during the course of the school day, six times during the school year. Teachers cluster by grade and address varied topics from conflict resolution to standardized testing, from implementing the core curriculum content standards to literacy series and instruction, and from supplemental math programs to gifted & talented/enrichment programming. TOPS is an after school, voluntary opportunity for teachers to engage and share in "study groups" with their colleagues to discuss educational issues, instructional strategies and technological advances in teaching.

Parents are invited to participate in activities such as the Math Game Night, that provide them the opportunity to learn about what is happening in their child's class.

The Chesterfield Township Public Education Fund is a foundation committed to enriching the educational resources available through the school through fund raising activities.

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

**General Provisions, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEP, Preschool Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, Programs and Services, 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 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 and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and related services (counseling goals and objectives). **The**

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**district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of extended school year because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district did not submit activities in the area of related services (counseling) and is required to do so.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding related services (counseling) extended school year and facilities. The facilities issue has been reported to the county office of education.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that extended school year is not discussed for all students. Additionally, when it is provided, the IEP does not include a description of the extended school year program nor does it include beginning and ending dates.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure extended school year programs are discussed for all students. The plan must further ensure the IEP includes a description of the program as well as beginning and ending dates. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. This plan must include in-service,**

**Counseling** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through staff interview and record review that every student who receives counseling as a related services has the exact goals and objectives no matter the reason for the need for these counseling services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure counseling goals and objectives are developed based on the individual needs of the students. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, meetings, written notice, native language and independent evaluations.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of meetings.

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

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**Notice of Meeting** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and verified through parent and staff interviews that the notice of a meeting informs parents of who may attend, not who will attend. As a result, meeting participants often differ from those identified in the notice of a meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure its notices of meetings identify the roles /positions of the individuals who will be in attendance at meetings. This plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find 3-21, direct referral, summer referral, vision and hearing screenings, health summary and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of identification meeting participants. **The district did not submit activities to address this area and is required to do so.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the referral process.

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

**Referral Process** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that documentation of pre-referral interventions does not include the effectiveness of interventions.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents its pre-referral interventions and their effectiveness. This plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **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 evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bi-lingual evaluations

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance/rejection of reports.

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### **Area of Need:**

**Acceptance/Rejection of Reports** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that when reports and assessments are submitted to the district for consideration, the district does not document the acceptance/rejection of the entire report or any part of the report and rationale for the rejection of the report or part of the report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure acceptance or rejection of reports is documented and included in the pupil's file. If the district rejects all or part of a report, a written rationale shall be documented and provided to the parent. This plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of school-age general education access, supplemental aids and services, and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum and individual decision-making at the preschool level. The district identified the extremely low number of preschool disabled students (2) as a barrier to developing a continuum of preschool options and the procedures the district follows regarding the individual decision-making process for preschoolers who require specialized programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding placement determinations.

### **Area of Need:**

**Program/Placement Determinations** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and verified through staff and parent interviews that CST members develop IEPs and identify specific programs/placements prior to conducting the IEP meeting with the other required participants. Though, at times, these program/placement decisions are changed as a result of the meeting, those changes are not reflected in the IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure program/placement decisions are made at the IEP meeting with all required participants in attendance. Those decisions must be made based on the information obtained from all participants and based on the identified needs of the students. Once the program/placement decision is made, the IEP needs to be completed to reflect the decision-making process that resulted in the specific program and placement decision. This plan must include in-service and an administrative**

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oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

The Chesterfield Township School District is a Kindergarten to sixth grade school district. Transition from school to post school is not applicable for the district.

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Chesterfield Township School District on March 10 and 11, 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. 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 provided input regarding many of the district's programs and services. Parents agreed that students with disabilities have full access to all general education programs, as well as extracurricular and nonacademic activities. Parents expressed overwhelming support for the teachers whom they considered "great." Parents indicated that communication with teachers was very good. Parents did express concern about delays in communication with staff, primarily child study team members and related services staff, who are employed on a part time basis. Some parents stated that their children's IEPs were vague, were not specific to their children, and did not challenge their children. Others believed the IEPs were individualized and met the needs of their children. Parents provided mixed opinions regarding progress reporting. There was consensus that teachers respond immediately when they are contacted.

Areas identified as consistently compliant with all standards by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Reevaluation, Eligibility, IEP, Preschool Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation (elementary level), Programs and Services and Student Records

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school/day year, certification, surrogate parents, transfer students, consent, meetings, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, direct referral, health summary, summer referral, vision and hearing screenings, ID-meeting timelines, school-age general education access and continuum, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum, supplemental aids and services, and preschool participation in nonacademic activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, related services (counseling goals and objectives), identification meeting participants, preschool continuum, and preschool individualized decision-making process.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, related services, facilities, notice of meeting, referral process, documentation of acceptance/rejection of reports, and the decision-making process for programs/placements for school-aged students.

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