

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

**District:** Cinnaminson Township School District

**County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** January 6, 7, 8, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Julia Harmelin, Jane Marano

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

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Cinnaminson 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 Cinnaminson 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 Cinnaminson 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 Cinnaminson Township Middle School on January 6, 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 a Cross Age Reading Experience (CARE), in which five classified students participate. The district was recognized for academic excellence in Best Practices for this program. The district also provides the Read Across America program in which a class of disabled students participated.

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The district also provides Kids Interacting with Sensational Seniors (KISS), which is a volunteer program in Cinnaminson's elementary schools. Senior citizens come into the school as mentors to work with special and regular education students who require extra help.

Project Challenge has also been implemented in the district to help meet the needs of students, both regular education and special education, who have special academic abilities or who have displayed the potential to be creative. Selection is based upon an evaluation of the TerraNova testing scores, teacher and/or principal nomination, parent nomination, and the Test of Cognitive Skills (if available).

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

**General Provisions, Eligibility, and Statewide Assessment** 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 provision of extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and hearing aids. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of counseling services.

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

**Provision of Counseling Services** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews that although crisis counseling is provided at the high school, IEP counseling services are not offered in the district due to lack of staff.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the need for counseling as a related service is considered for students who demonstrate the need for such services. The plan must also include a mechanism to ensure the district either has or will obtain sufficient staff to provide these services.**

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**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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 the referral process, direct parent referrals, direct staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for school-aged children, identification meeting timelines and participants for school-aged children.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings for preschool students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding child find and meeting participants for preschool students.

**Areas of Need:**

**Child Find** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews that although the district provides information regarding the referral process for preschool age students, this information is not provided to the parents of school age students or students who are migrant or homeless.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that information regarding the referral process is provided to parents of school-aged, migrant and homeless children and includes the use of community resources. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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**Meeting Participants for Preschool Students** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that regular education teachers are not attending identification meetings or IEP meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers participate in all required meetings for preschool students. The plan must include 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 multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of written reports. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

#### **Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants, and meetings for students turning age five.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants for school-aged students, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, and 90-day timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of teacher knowledge and access to IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants for preschool students IEP meetings, participants at summer IEP meetings, initial IEP meetings, and implementation dates.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Participants at Summer IEP Meetings** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that regular and special education teachers are not consistently attending summer IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular and special education teachers attend summer IEP meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Initial Meetings** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although all required participants attend eligibility meetings and eligibility determinations are made, the scope of the meeting includes a discussion of placement and program options. At the conclusion of the meeting, notice of eligibility is provided. At a later date, the case manager and parent meet to decide the program and placement and to develop the IEP. As a result, the required members of the IEP team are not participating in the decision-making process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure required members of the IEP team participate in the decision-making process regarding program and placement options. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Implementation Dates of IEPs** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that implementation dates of IEPs do not include summer dates for those students who receive extended school year and/or speech therapy during the summer.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the IEP includes implementation and ending dates for students receiving services during the summer months. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **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, supplemental aids and services, and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular participation for out-of-district students. **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 these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding individualized decision-making/continuum.

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

**Individualized Decision-Making/Continuum** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that there is a need for in-district programs to address the functional needs of students at the high school level. Currently, students with multiple disabilities who need a more functional curriculum are sent to out-of-district programs, disallowing the opportunity to participate in some academic activities with their nondisabled peers.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure functional skills programs are available to students with disabilities to afford those students the opportunity to participate in some academic activities with their nondisabled peers. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section X: Transition to Preschool**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three.

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 and agency invitation, age 14 transition service needs, and age 16 needed transition services.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of preferences and interests and agency involvement. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures for students age 13 who will be turning age 14 during the course of that IEP, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of courses of study.

### **Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Courses of Study** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review that courses of study and preferences and interests are not consistently documented in IEPs for students older than age 16. These courses and interests and preferences are only identified in IEPs for students who are fourteen and fifteen years of age.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the transition section of IEPs consistently documents courses of study and interests and preferences for every student fourteen years of age and older. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, functional behavioral assessments and interim alternative education setting (IAES).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of protections afforded to potentially disabled students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district further identified concerns in the areas of behavior intervention plans and change in placement. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because they lack in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The district also identified concerns in the areas of short-term removals and manifestation determinations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because they lack procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plans need to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation to case managers and suspension tracking.

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### **Areas of Need:**

**Documentation to Case Managers/Tracking of Removals** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that written notification of the removal of disabled students as a result of disciplinary issues is not consistently provided in a timely fashion. Additionally, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that there is no consistent method in place to ensure the accurate tracking of these removals.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure case managers are provided with written notification prior to the removal of a student with disabilities. The plan must further include a mechanism to ensure each removal is tracked by the case manager to further ensure the completion of all IDEA mandated disciplinary activities. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

### ***Section XIII: Graduation***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and written notice.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of choice of diploma for out-of-district students and participation of out-of-district students in district activities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.** The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

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

### ***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, personnel, programs, and common planning time.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the lack of sufficient child study team members. The improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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



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**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access, access sheets for students eligible for special education and related services, and maintenance and destruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of other locations of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Cinnaminson Township School District on January 6, 7, 8, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. 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 expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Some parents expressed concerns with the referral process and the lack of communication with district staff.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Eligibility, and Statewide Assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, notice of a meeting, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings for school-aged children, identification meeting timelines, participants for school-aged children, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluation participants, meetings for students turning age five, IEP participants for school-aged students, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three, student and agency invitation, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, discipline procedures, functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative education setting (IAES), IEP graduation requirements, written notice of graduation, class size, age range, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, personnel, programs, common planning time, parent and adult student access, access sheets for students eligible for special education and related services, maintenance of records and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer students, hearing aids, parent participation at meetings, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for preschool students, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, teacher knowledge and access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation for out-of-district students, documentation of students age 14 preferences and interests, agency involvement, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, change in placement, protections afforded to potentially disabled students, short-term removals, choice of diploma and participation of graduation for out-of-district students, and child study team personnel.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding provision of counseling services, child find 3-21, identification meeting participants for preschool students, participants at summer meetings, IEP participants for preschool students, initial IEP meetings, implementation dates, individualized decision-making/continuum, documentation of courses of study, documentation of suspension to case manager/tracking of removals.

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