

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

**District:** Colts Neck School District

**County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Date:** April 27, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Barbara J. Tucker and Debbie Masarsky

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Colts Neck School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Colts Neck 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 Colts Neck School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

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 district's Administration Building on April 22, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring activities. Additionally, 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 administrator, speech therapists and child study team members. Based on these sources, OSEP staff determined that the district had conducted a thorough review during the self-assessment process and had developed a plan, warranting only minor revisions which will appropriately address all areas of identified need.

**District Strengths:**

The Colts Neck School District is commended for its **use of technology**. The district has developed a website and uses e-mail for linking staff and students. These technological mediums foster open communication among parents, students and staff.

The district is also commended for its **1-2-3 Go Program**. This program which meets once a week is designed to promote student organization and test-taking skills which will enable students to improve performance in the classroom. Active dialogue between the

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teacher-facilitator and students address student challenges in the classroom and empower students to handle academic challenges in more effective ways.

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

**General Provisions, Reevaluations, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment 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.

### **Part One Data Summary:**

The Colts Neck School District is commended for maintaining a classification rate that has consistently been below the state average for the last three years. Moreover, compared to the state average of 41%, 61.3 % of the district's special needs students are educated in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day with their non-disabled peers. The district is further commended for developing an improvement plan which continues this positive trend through provision of staff training that will assist them in documenting the interventions which are used in general education classes prior to referring a student to the child study team. A review of data for the district also indicated that with modifications and accommodations, the district has 100% participation in statewide assessments for students ages 9-11, as well as those students in grade eight.

A review of data for the district also indicated that with modifications and accommodations, the district has 100% participation in the statewide assessments for students ages nine to eleven as well as those students in grade eight. Results of the 2000-2001 statewide assessments indicated that 31.3% percent of the students with disabilities who took the test at the elementary level scored in the proficient range, while 28.6% of the eighth graders with disabilities who took the test scored in the proficient range.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day/year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of hearing aid checks by the school nurse and procedures for transfer students. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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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, notices/meetings in native language, interpreters at meetings, 20-day calendar response, provision of procedural safeguards, meetings at a mutually convenient time, documentation of attempts to secure parental participation and availability of translation resources.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of components of written notice, notice of meetings and independent evaluations. Although the district initially identified these as area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines/participants and documentation of interventions and their effectiveness.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of the referral process. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments for speech/language students, written reports, signed/dated reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports and meetings for parents of speech/language students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multidisciplinary assessment of speech/language students and nature and scope of the evaluations for students potentially eligible for speech/language services. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that

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it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting/participants, severe learning discrepancy statement of eligibility and signature of agreement/disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of evaluation reports to parents and criteria for determining eligibility of students identified eligible for speech/language services. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of signatures of meeting participants, annual goals and objectives, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, annual timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEPs in effect before programs and services are provided, IEPs to parents prior to implementation date, documentation of assistive technology in the present levels of educational performance (PLEPs) and IEP consideration/statements for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech language services. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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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 decision-making process and regular education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of the decision-making process, non-academic/extra-curricular activities for out-of-district students and access to least restrictive environment with supplementary aids and services for preschoolers. Although the district initially identified these as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

**Section XIII: Graduation is not applicable in this K-8 district.**

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class size waivers, age-range waivers, group sizes for speech, consultation time and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of insufficient staff. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring activities were conducted in the Colts Neck School District on April 29, 2004. 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 Colts Neck School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic changes in most areas. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs through a desk audit, a focus group meeting and parent interviews. Additionally, General Provisions, Reevaluations, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment 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.

For the past three years, the Colts Neck School District has consistently maintained a classification rate that has been below the state average. More importantly, 61.6% of the district's special needs students have been able to be educated in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day with their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, the district's improvement plan not only indicates the district's commitment to continue this positive trend, it demonstrates various means by which the district can improve upon these trends through the provision of staff training. Data for the district indicated that the district has a 100% participation rate in the statewide assessments for students ages 9-11, as well as those for students in grade eight.

At a public focus group meeting held on April 22, 2004 and attended by over 30 parents, teachers, administrators and child study team members, parents praised the district for establishing lines of communication with staff, the quality of programs and services provided by the district and the sensitivity of team members in understanding both parent and student needs. One parent expressed frustration with the availability of services and another about the referral process and timely provision of related services despite the fact that there was no evidence that students are denied services identified in the IEP. However during the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need with regard to the referral process and has developed an improvement plan that has been determined sufficient to correct this area of need.

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 programs and related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, notices/meetings in native language, interpreters at meetings, 20-day calendar response, provision of procedural safeguards, meetings at a mutually convenient time, documentation of attempts to secure parental participation, availability of translation resources, child find, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines/participants, documentation of interventions and their effectiveness, standardized assessments, functional assessments for speech/language students, written reports, signed/dated reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, meetings for parents of speech/language students, meetings/participants, severe learning discrepancy (SLD) statement of eligibility, signature of agreement/disagreement, annual goals and objectives, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of

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majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process for school-aged students, regular education access for school-aged students, class size waivers, age-range waivers, group sizes for speech, consultation time and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding hearing aid checks by the school nurse, procedures for transfer students, components of written notice, notice of meeting, independent evaluations, referral process, multidisciplinary assessment of speech/language students, nature and scope of the evaluations for students potentially eligible for speech/language services, provision of evaluation reports to parents, criteria for students identified eligible for speech/language services, IEPs to parents prior to implementation date, IEPs in effect before programs and services are provided, IEP consideration/statements for students eligible for special education and related services and students eligible for speech/language services, documentation of assistive technology in the Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP), documentation of the decision-making process, non-academic/extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, access to least restrictive with supplementary aids and services for preschoolers and insufficient staff.

No additional areas of need were identified during the desk audit, focus group meeting and/or parent interviews.