

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

**District:** Commercial Township School District      **County:** Cumberland

**Monitoring Dates:** May 20, 22 and 23, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Julia B. Harmelin and Jane A. Marano

***Background Information:***

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Commercial 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 Commercial 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 Commercial Township School District developed an improvement plan to address their 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 Haleyville-Mauricetown Elementary School, on May 9, 2002. 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, and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The district operates several after-school clubs and activities, in which both general education and special education students can participate. These include the homework club, safety patrol, and the computer club where teachers are available to meet with students to offer extra educational assistance.

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

**Procedural Safeguards, Graduation and Student Records** were determined by the district to be areas of compliance during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of professional and parent development. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks topics such as parental rights and responsibilities, 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 elements.

No additional area of need was identified 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 extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with the provision of related services (i.e., occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, counseling and transportation). The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities. The county office has been notified.

#### ***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 referrals for school-aged students (staff and parents), vision and hearing screenings, and identification meetings (participants and timelines).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding referral process, summer referrals, and health summary. The district's improvement

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plan is sufficient to address the referral process. The improvement plan regarding summer referrals and health summaries is insufficient because it lacks 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.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding direct referrals by teachers for preschool students.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Direct Preschool Referrals** – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that preschool teachers have been directed not to refer preschool students to the Child Study Team for evaluations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that preschool teachers are afforded the opportunity to refer students to the Child Study Team for evaluation. The improvement plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of this procedure.**

### **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, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding functional assessments and written reports. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding meetings, participants, documentation of eligibility, and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of criteria for eligibility for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

No additional area of concern was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant with considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), implementation dates, annual review timelines for students eligible for special education and related services, and 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns in the areas of participants, age of majority, and teacher knowledge and access. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site regarding annual review timelines for students eligible for speech and language services.

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

**Annual Review Timelines for ESLs Students** – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that annual timelines are not met consistently for students eligible for speech and language services (ESLS).

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that annual review timelines are consistently met for students eligible for speech and language services. The improvement plan must include training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, *Oberti*, considerations and documentation, and general education access.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum of services, and preschool access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address supplemental aids and services and continuum of services because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address out-of-district participation and preschool access. The plan needs to be revised to address these missing components.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding preschool transition planning conference, student invitation, age-14 transition service needs including courses of study and preferences and interests, and age-16 transition service needs.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding agency invitation and involvement.

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

Agency Identification/Invitation – During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although the district has a policy for identifying and inviting agencies to IEP and transition meetings, these procedures are not implemented for students age-14 or turning age-14.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that agencies are appropriately identified and invited to meetings for students age-14 or turning age-14 are appropriately implemented. The improvement plan needs to include a training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these procedures.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks 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 area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral assessments and manifestation determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding procedures, documentation to case managers, suspension tracking, and interim alternate educational settings. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

**Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process the district identified an area of need regarding alternate assessments. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

No additional area of need was 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 waivers, age-range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and schedules.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding home instruction approvals, common planning time, written descriptions, and in-class resource center. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks 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 area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Commercial Township School District on May 20, 22 and 23, 2002. 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 this review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were 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, two parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, while another parent expressed her dissatisfaction with the speech and language services her preschool child is receiving. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Parent interviews indicated dissatisfaction with the academic progress of their children in the district, primarily at the eighth grade level.

Areas identified as consistently compliant in all standards by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included procedural safeguards, graduation, and student records. The district was also consistently compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, teacher certifications, child find 3-21, direct referrals for school-aged students, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting participants and timelines, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluation meeting participants, turning age five meetings, eligibility meetings and participants, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, IEP considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines for students eligible for special education and related services, 90-day timelines, IEP participants, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access, individualized decision-making, *Oberti*, IEP considerations and documentation, general education access, preschool transition planning conference, student invitation, age 14 transition service needs including courses of study and preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, behavior intervention plans/functional behavior assessments, manifestation determinations, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation of statewide assessment, class-size waivers, age-range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and teacher schedules.

During the self-assessment process the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, the provision of related services, the referral process, summer referrals, health summary, functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, written reports, re-evaluation timelines, eligibility criteria, IEP participants, age of majority, teacher knowledge and access, supplemental aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, Early Intervention Program to Pre-School Disabled by age 3, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternate educational settings, alternate statewide

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assessments, home instruction approvals, common planning time for teachers, in-class resource options, and written descriptions of programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, direct referral for preschool children, independent evaluations, agency invitation, and agency involvement.

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