

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

District: Cumberland Regional High School District

County: Cumberland

Monitoring Dates: April 6, 2005

Monitor: Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Cumberland Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Cumberland Regional High School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 give the district the opportunity to identify its areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Cumberland Regional High School District developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

As the first step to verifying the self-assessment findings, to assessing the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Cumberland Regional High School on the evening of February 14, 2005. Information obtained from this meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities.

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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrator, building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

District Strengths:

The Cumberland Regional High School District is commended for establishing the "Colt Connection", a system of school-based youth services funded through a grant with the Municipal Alliance. All students are able to access health and physical services and mental health counseling when needed. The "Colt Connection" also assists families in

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accessing community-based services and provides support for other school-based programs, such as field trips.

The district is further commended for The Peer Group Connection. Any interested senior may apply for the program and following an interview, receive training on communication, problem solving, and other conflict resolution strategies. Students then have the opportunity to work with freshmen on facilitating communication and other mentoring activities.

Data Summary:

A review of the data submitted by the Cumberland Regional High School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the district's classification rate for 2004 was 12.3%. This rate decreased by approximately 4% from 2002. Despite this positive trend and the fact that the rate is currently below the state average, the district has identified classification rate as an area of need and developed improvement plan activities to address the issue. Data from 2004 also indicate that approximately 30% of students with disabilities are placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. This is an increase of nearly 9% from 2002; however, the rate continues to be below the state average. The district has identified a need for additional in-class support programs and has addressed the issue in the improvement plan. A further review of the data from 2004 indicates that 3.5% of students with disabilities are educated in out-of-district placements. This rate is less than the state average. The district has reduced the rate of out-of-district placements by 2% since 2002. District personnel attribute this to two in-district programs: one for students with multiple disabilities and one for students with behavioral and emotional issues. Both of these programs have increased the district's capacity to accommodate students with disabilities at the local district level while affording them the opportunity for interaction with their non-disabled peers.

Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance 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 training for parents, teachers and support staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of length of school day/year, certification, and facilities.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of speech-language services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding adaptive physical education, counseling, goals and objectives for related services and maintenance of hearing aids. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and transfer procedures.

Area(s) of Need:

Extended School Year – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that extended school year is not consistently considered and discussed for all students.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that extended school year is considered for all students with disabilities. Implementation of these activities will result in the consideration of regression/recoupment issues in program development for all students. The improvement plan must include in-service training for school personnel and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Transfer Procedures – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that the child study team does not consistently review records for transfer students and document the results of the review.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that records for transfer students are reviewed by the child study team. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the district reviews the necessary information to determine placement and programs and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, and written notice in native language. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice of a meeting and provision of procedural safeguards.

Area(s) of Need:

Notice of a Meeting – During the on-site monitoring, a review of records determined that notice of a meeting does not consistently identify the purpose of the meeting. When reevaluation is to be discussed, it is not consistently identified in the notice of a meeting. In addition, transition is only identified in notice of an annual review, and not in each case where an IEP may be reviewed and/or developed. Notice of a meeting also does not include a statement of the parent’s right to invite persons with expertise regarding their child to the IEP meeting.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of a meeting includes all the required components and accurately identifies the purpose of the meeting. The district should review the state sample notices at www.state.nj.us to assist in revising forms. Implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed as to their rights and the discussions that will occur at the meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Provision of Procedural Safeguards – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that parents are not provided with a copy of the due process hearing rules. In addition, the district does not document the provision of N.J.A.C. 6A:14.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that parents are provided with a copy of N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and 1:6A when required. Implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed as to their rights regarding evaluation and educational decisions. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Child Find, direct referrals, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding classification rate and referral procedures. **The district’s improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures, including those for referral, are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Vision/Hearing Screenings – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that a vision/hearing screening is not completed prior to the identification meeting for students referred for evaluation.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that vision/hearing screenings are conducted prior to the identification meeting and that results are discussed as part of the evaluation planning process. Implementation of these activities will ensure that identification team members will have the necessary information to identify suspected disabilities and to determine the assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Identification Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and records review that the full child study team does not consistently attend identification meetings.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the full child study team is in attendance at identification meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the appropriate decision-makers participate in the discussion and evaluation planning. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary and standardized evaluations, and written reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of bilingual evaluations. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of three-year timelines and planning meetings.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding undue delay and planning meeting participants.

Area(s) of Need:

Undue Delay – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that reevaluations are not conducted without undue delay once parent consent has been obtained. In a number of the cases reviewed, the period of time between consent and eligibility determination extended as long as six to eight months. As a result, assessments are conducted well after parental consent is obtained and the evaluation plans have not considered any interim change in the student's needs. In addition, interviews with staff members indicated that some of the delay was due to a lack of understanding of code requirements. Team members were unaware that the evaluation process could proceed if parents failed to respond to requests for consent.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that reevaluation plans are implemented without undue delay once parental consent has been obtained. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the assessments conducted are relevant to the student's current educational program and level of functioning. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Planning Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that general education teachers are not consistently in attendance at reevaluation planning meetings. In addition, interviews with staff members indicated that parents and teachers may be asked to sign, when in fact they were not in attendance at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required participants are in attendance at reevaluation planning meetings and that signatures represent actual participation. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the required decision-makers have input in the determinations regarding assessments. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

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Section VII: Eligibility

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, provision of evaluation reports to parents, eligibility criteria, and statements of eligibility.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants and certification of agreement/disagreement.

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that general education teachers are not consistently in attendance at eligibility meetings. In addition, interviews with staff members indicated that parents and teachers may be asked to sign, when in fact they were not in attendance at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required participants are in attendance at eligibility meetings and that signatures represent actual participation. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the required decision-makers have input in the determinations regarding eligibility. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Certification of Agreement/Disagreement – During the on-site monitoring it was determined that meeting participants are not signing agreement or disagreement with the eligibility determination.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all members of the IEP team sign agreement or disagreement with the eligibility determination. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully informed of differing opinions regarding eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of considerations/required components, present levels of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), implementation dates, age of majority, and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of vocational participation at meetings, progress reporting to parents on IEP goals and objectives, and teacher access/knowledge of IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is**

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insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants, goals and objectives for resource programs, descriptions of IEP programs, and initial evaluation timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Meeting Participants – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that general education teachers are not consistently in attendance at IEP meetings. In addition, interviews with staff members indicated that parents and teachers may be asked to sign, when in fact they were not in attendance at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required participants are in attendance at IEP meetings and that signatures represent actual participation. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the required decision-makers have input in the decisions regarding programs and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Description of IEP Programs – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that IEPs identify some courses as special education, but do not consistently identify location, specifically whether they are in-class or pull-out resource settings, for elective courses.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs specify the location of special education services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents and staff members are fully informed as to the services to be provided, including the setting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Initial Evaluation Timelines – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews and record review that initial evaluations are not consistently completed within 90 days.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that initial evaluations are completed within required timelines. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students who may be in need of special education and related services are evaluated in a timely fashion and services provided, where needed. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of notification/participation in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding a need for more in-class support programs, individualized decision-making and consideration of supports and program options within the IEP process. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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 compliance in the areas of agency invitations, statements of needed transition services, student interests and preferences, procedures for conducting individual assessments, establishing partnerships with community resources, and monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by outside agencies.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study, access to guidance activities, and student participation.

Area(s) of Need:

Courses of Study – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that IEPs do not consistently identify specific courses of study.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs identify the specific courses of study. Implementation of these activities will ensure that courses of study appropriately reflect the student's interests and preferences and afford the student the opportunity to achieve successful post-secondary outcomes. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Access to Guidance Activities – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through interviews with staff and parents that students with disabilities do not have the same access to guidance activities. Case managers are instead providing services that guidance personnel provide to non-disabled students. During the course of the on-site monitoring, it was noted that the district has begun to address the issue.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same guidance**

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activities as non-disabled students. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities for career planning as non-disabled students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.

Student Participation – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that students with disabilities do not consistently attend IEP meetings to discuss transition planning, nor does the district consistently document that they are invited.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students with disabilities are invited to attend IEP meetings to discuss transition planning when required. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students with disabilities are afforded the opportunity to participate in transition planning. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination, functional behavioral assessments, and procedures for short-term and long-term removals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of suspension rates, procedures for placement in interim alternative education settings (IAES), and procedures for conducting expedited evaluations for potentially disabled students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding behavior intervention plans.

Area(s) of Need:

Behavior Intervention Plans – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that behavior intervention plans are not consistently included in IEPs for students with behavior needs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs include behavior intervention plans for students with behavior needs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the necessary supports and interventions are provided to address problem**

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behaviors. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.

Section XII: Statewide Assessment

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of proficiency rates and participation in the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) and the Special Review Assessment (SRA). **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP documentation and participation in graduation exercises.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of graduation/dropout rates, surveys of post-graduate activities, and written notice of graduation. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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 compliance in the areas of class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of collaborative planning time, need for additional personnel and grouping students with similar education needs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks administrative oversight activities to ensure that revised procedures are implemented consistently. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of parent and adult-student access to records, access sheets, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

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 Cumberland Regional High School District on April 6, 2005. 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 its review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that, with 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.

A review of the data submitted by the Cumberland Regional High School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the district's classification rate for 2004 is 12.3%. This rate has decreased by approximately 4% since 2002. Despite this positive trend and the fact that the rate is currently below the state average, the district has identified this as an area of need and developed improvement plan activities to address the issue. Data from 2004 also indicates that approximately 30% of students with disabilities are placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day. This is an increase of nearly 9% since 2002; however the rate continues to be below the state average. The district has identified a need for additional in-class support programs and has addressed the issue in the improvement plan. A further review of the data for 2004 indicates that placement rate for students in out-of-district placements is currently 3.5%, which is below the state average. The district has reduced the number of out-of-district placements by 2% since 2002 and district personnel attribute this to two in-district programs: one for students with multiple disabilities and one for students with behavioral and emotional issues. Both of these programs have increased the district's capacity to accommodate students with disabilities at the local district level while affording them the opportunity for interaction with their non-disabled peers.

Approximately six parents and one adult student attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. During this meeting, they expressed their satisfaction with a number of the district's programs and services. Concerns were raised regarding teacher knowledge of individualized education program (IEP) content and progress reporting to parents. Both of these issues were identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Additional concerns were raised regarding extended school year and access to guidance activities. This was confirmed by on-site monitoring activities.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) information, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, independent evaluations, Child Find, identification meeting timelines, direct referrals, summer referrals, multi-disciplinary and standardized evaluations, written reports, conducting reevaluation planning meetings, eligibility determination and criteria, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP components, present levels of educational performance, alignment of goals and objectives with the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), IEP implementation dates, IEP revisions, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews and reevaluations, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, agency invitations, statements of needed transition services, student interests and preferences, procedures for conducting individual assessments, establishing partnerships with community resources, monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by

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outside agencies, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determinations, functional behavior assessments, procedures for short-term removals, accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation of graduation requirements, participation in graduation exercises, class size and age range, group size for speech therapy, homebound instruction, procedures for parent and/or adult student access to records, access sheets, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) include provision of speech-language services and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent/staff/support staff training, adaptive physical education, counseling, goals and objectives for related services, maintenance of hearing aids, surrogate parents, consent, written notice in native language, classification rate/referral procedures, vocational participation at IEP meetings, progress reporting to parents, teacher access/knowledge of IEP responsibilities, suspension rates, procedures for placement in Interim Alternative Education Settings (IAES), procedures for conducting expedited evaluations for potentially disabled students, statewide assessment proficiency rates, participation in the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) and Special Review Assessment (SRA), graduation/drop out rates, surveys of post-graduate activities, written notice of graduation, collaborative planning time, staffing needs, and student groupings.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding extended school year, transfer procedures, notice of a meeting, provision of procedural safeguards, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, functional assessments, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation without undue delay, reevaluation planning meeting participants, eligibility meeting participants, certification of agreement/disagreement, descriptions of IEP programs, initial evaluation timelines, courses of study, access to guidance activities, student participation in transition planning, and development of behavior intervention plans.

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