

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

**District:** Delaware Township School District

**County:** Hunterdon

**Monitoring Dates:** October 24, 2003 and November 12, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Kim Murray, Deborah Masarsky, Vanessa Leonard

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Delaware 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 Delaware 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 Delaware 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 Delaware Township School District on October 16, 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, and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for training all of its special education and basic skills teachers in the Wilson Reading Method as an additional means to address literacy in the classroom. In addition, the district has equipped general education classes with electronic whiteboards or multi-functional scanner/copier/printers, which allows special education students to receive copies of class notes during the lesson. The district also developed a study skills support program that special education students may choose to

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access during their extended lunch period. This program concentrates on test-taking skills, study techniques and report writing.

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

**Statewide Assessment** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

### **Data Summary:**

The Delaware Township School District currently has a classification rate of 14.2%, which is slightly below the state average. Over the last three years, the district has increased the number of students placed in general education for more than 80% of the day from 50.6% to 76.8%, which is significantly above the state average of 41.6%. During the 2002-2003 school year, 42.9% of preschool aged students were placed in general education settings, exceeding the state average of 23.2%.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures, staff development and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas 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 themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, certification, and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of assistive technology. The district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of ensuring students have functioning hearing aids. 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.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants, content of notices for students eligible for special education and related services, notices in native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of notices, written notice following IEP meetings of students eligible for speech and language services and the selection and training of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding content of notices for students eligible for speech language services.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that the notices for students eligible for speech language services do not contain the required components.

- **The district will revise its notices for students eligible for speech language services to ensure they contain the required components.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and health summary. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding referral dates for students referred for speech and language evaluations.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Referral Dates** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and document review that referrals for speech evaluations are not dated. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether identification meetings are held within the twenty-day timeline.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure referrals are dated. Implementation of these activities will ensure students are evaluated, when necessary, and that the evaluation is conducted in a timely manner.**

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### **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 and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of development of written reports for students eligible for speech language services, signed and dated reports for students eligible for speech language services and acceptance/rejection of privately obtained and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding consent to evaluate and functional assessments for students identified as potentially eligible for speech language services.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Consent** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that consent to evaluate is not consistently obtained for students potentially eligible for speech language services because staff members are not implementing the existing procedures.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure written consent is obtained prior to conducting any evaluations on students identified as potentially eligible for speech language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are fully informed of the actions to which he/she is consenting.**

**Functional Assessments** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that functional assessments for students potentially eligible for speech language services are not conducted because staff members are not are not aware of the code requirements.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure functional assessments are conducted as a component of the evaluation of students identified as potentially eligible for speech language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on assessment results obtained through a number of different sources.**

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings, participants, parental consent to reevaluate and reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation timelines. 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 VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria and documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting and referral to the child study team from the speech therapist. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of considerations and required statements. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access to regular education, continuum of programs, individualized decision-making, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and supplementary aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of considerations of the least restrictive environment. 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.

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of age 14 transition services needs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool program disabled by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notification of suspensions to the case managers. The district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about correction in this area. The district also identified a concern in the area of referral to the child study team while a student is subject to disciplinary action. 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 XIII: Graduation**

As Delaware Township is a k-8 district, there are no findings in this area.

### **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, aides and home instruction.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of employing child study team members in sufficient numbers and class descriptions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access to student records and access sheets. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 Delaware Township School District on November 12, 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 Delaware Township School District is to be commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of their review, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that has already resulted in systemic change 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed growing satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and felt that improvement has occurred during the last few years. Parents felt they were included in the decision-making process and that their participation was valued. Areas of concern were the lack of training for regular education teachers on special education topics and a lack of funding for technology in the classroom. These areas were identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, certification, facilities, meeting participants, content of notices for students eligible for special education and related services, notices in native language, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, participants, parental consent to reevaluate, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool, meetings, participants, criteria, documentation of eligibility, participants, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, access to regular education, continuum of programs, individualized decision-making, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, supplementary aids and services, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, class size, age range, aides, home instruction, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, parent training, assistive technology, provision of notices, written notice following IEP meetings of students eligible for speech and language services, selection and training of surrogate parents, pre-referral interventions, health summary, development of written reports for students eligible for speech language services, signed and dated reports for students eligible for speech language services, acceptance/rejection of privately obtained and independent evaluations, reevaluation timelines, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting, referral to the child study team from the speech therapist, considerations and required statements, documentation of consideration of the least restrictive environment, age 14 transition services needs, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool program disabled by age



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three, notification of suspensions to the case manager, referral to the child study team while a student is subject to disciplinary action, employing child study team members in sufficient numbers, class descriptions, access to student records and access sheets.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding content of notices for students eligible for speech language services, twenty-day timeline for students referred for speech and language evaluations, consent to evaluate and functional assessments for students identified as potentially eligible for speech language services.

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