

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

**District:** Eastern Regional School District

**County:** Camden

**Monitoring Dates:** January 7, 8 and 9, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, and Julia Harmelin

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Eastern Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Eastern Regional 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 Eastern Regional 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 Eastern Regional High School on November 19, 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 administrator, building principals, guidance personnel, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for the array of unique instructional programs offered to students. Among these programs is the Preschool Child Development Lab. This program offers high school students the opportunity to work directly with community preschool children in a lab setting and helps them develop skills related to teaching and

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child development. The district also operates a television studio (Eastern T.V.), which broadcasts news programs and documentaries on student activities. Students in this program have the opportunity to become involved in all aspects of TV production.

The district also provides a wide variety of clubs and activities open to all students, including those with disabilities. Of particular note is the SUCCESS club, which provides mentoring and social skills opportunities for students. The INTERACT club provides students with the opportunity to become involved in community service projects which foster the development of student leadership skills, assists students in demonstrating helpfulness and respect for others, and helps students understand the value of individual responsibility and hard work. Other school groups address a variety of critical issues such as anger management and study skills.

The district has developed a job coaching program which affords students with disabilities the opportunity to learn job skills in community-based work experiences. Instruction and support are offered to students both on and off the job site. The district has made a strong commitment to this program and offers transportation to and from the work sites as well as support when needed during the summer months.

The Eastern Education Foundation, a non-profit organization formed to enhance and enrich the academic experience for all students in the Eastern Regional School District, has provided funding for a number of programs that have directly benefited students with disabilities. Funds from this organization have been used to sponsor social activities for disabled students. The organization has also funded community services projects like the walk-a-thon, which includes students with disabilities. The foundation has provided seed money for the School Store project which is operated through the special education department. In addition, the foundation has provided funds for the district's Professional Development Academy, which provides teacher training on a wide variety of topics, including special education.

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

Data submitted by the Eastern Regional School District indicated that placement of students with disabilities in general education settings is above the state average. 42.5% of these students are placed in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day. This represents an increase of 6.4% since the 2000-2001 school year. In addition, the number of students in public and/or private separate settings has decreased 5.5% since the 2000-2001 school year. This is attributed, in part, to the establishment of the Chance Program, an in-district program for students with behavior disabilities. 7.8% of the classified pupils are placed in separate settings, which is below the state average of 9.1%. In addition to these positive trends, the district has identified a need for more supplemental aids and services to support classified students in regular education. The district has addressed this need through their improvement plan.

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

**Evaluation** 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.

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### ***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 area of professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding paraprofessional and parent development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks a mechanism to determine if training efforts have been effective.** The district additionally identified concerns regarding policies and procedures. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because the plan identifies the same person to be responsible for implementation and oversight. The plan must identify an administrator to conduct oversight activities since only an administrator may supervise and evaluate staff.**

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 provision of adaptive PE, length of school day/year, and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer procedures and provision of programs and related services for students transferring into the district. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding certification. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district also identified concerns regarding extended school year. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because timelines identified for completion of the activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. In addition, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent for purposes other than reevaluation, written notice, notice timelines, meetings, and independent evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding procedures for obtaining written consent for reevaluation and required components of notice of a meeting. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns in the area of procedures for identifying and training surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district also identified concerns regarding procedures for increasing parent/child study team communication. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice in native language.

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

**Native Language** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not ensure that notice is provided in the native language of the parents, when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is provided in the native language of the parent, when feasible. The implementation of these activities will ensure parents whose primary language is not English, have the opportunity to fully participate in program planning as well as have a complete understanding of any decisions made by the IEP team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the plan.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures for direct referrals, summer referrals, and identification meetings (timelines and participants).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find procedures, an overrepresentation of minority students in special education, documentation of pre-referral interventions, and procedures for moving referrals from the level of pre-referral to the child study team, when warranted. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified.** The district further identified concerns regarding the health summary and inclusion of vision/hearing screening information. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because, although the plan requires that this information be forwarded to the child study team, it is not provided by the time of the identification meeting. As a result, the information cannot be considered as part of the determination of the need for an evaluation. In addition, the plan does not identify an oversight component that will ensure**

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**consistent implementation of procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluation planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and procedures for proceeding with evaluations without undue delay once consent has been obtained. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns regarding teacher participation at reevaluation planning meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

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 eligibility meetings and participants and eligibility criteria and documentation for categories other than "Other Health Impaired."

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of eligibility documentation for students under the category of "Other Health Impaired." On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to convening an eligibility conference. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because timelines identified for completion of the activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of annual review timelines and provision of the notice of rights at the age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meeting participants, IEP components, IEP goals and objectives, implementation dates, providing opportunities for parents to observe proposed placements, providing parents with a copy of the IEP prior to implementation, timelines for conducting initial evaluations, and procedures for revising IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for informing regular education teachers of their IEP responsibilities.

**Area(s) of Need:**

**IEP Responsibilities for Regular Education Teachers** - During the on-site monitoring, interviews with parents and staff members indicated that regular education teachers are not consistently aware of the modifications and accommodations required in student IEPs. According to current procedures, teachers are informed at the beginning of the school year as to which students require accommodations and/or modifications. However, although copies of IEPs were made available to teachers, scheduling problems this year made it difficult to provide this information in a timely manner. Further, there has been inconsistent follow-up to ensure that all regular education teachers are implementing these required accommodations and modifications, especially in courses that are not scheduled for in-class support.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that regular education teachers are informed of their IEP responsibilities in a timely manner and that accommodations and modifications identified in student IEPs are implemented on a consistent basis within the regular education setting. The implementation of these activities will ensure students have the opportunity to receive maximum educational benefit from their programs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the 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 themselves compliant in the area of access to regular education programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, justification for removal from regular education, consideration of the need for supplemental aids and services, participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities, and continuum of services. Barriers to compliance include scheduling, staffing, and budgetary constraints. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. Further, although the plan identifies a need to expand in-class support services as well as explore the need for alternatives to in-class support, the plan does not identify how the district will make these determinations. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of agency involvement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of courses of study, student invitations, statement of transition service needs, identification of the post secondary liaison, provision of programs that promote successful transition, determination of student interests and preferences, conducting individual assessments, and procedures for transitioning students from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

No additional areas of need were 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 suspension tracking, procedures for conducting manifestation determination meetings, and procedures for placing students in interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for reducing discipline referrals, documentation of removals to case managers, development of behavior intervention plans, implementation of a discipline code for all students, and records requirements when reporting a crime. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

No additional areas of need were 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 in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, and alternate assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of approved accommodations and modification, child study team knowledge of appropriate modifications, proficiency levels, and the SRA process. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and written notice.



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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of choice of diploma and participation in graduation exercised. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding graduation and dropout rates. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because although the plan identifies the person(s) responsible for oversight, in some cases the same person is responsible for implementation of the original activity. Since only an administrator may supervise staff, another individual needs to be identified to ensure staff are appropriately implementing these activities. In addition, the plan does not identify what specific oversight activities will be implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

### **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas age range and group size for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size, provision of homebound instruction, resource (in-class support, pull-out, and Academic Lab) and elective courses, equitable participation by non-public students, collaborative planning time for resource teachers, case management for students transitioning to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and descriptions of special class programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s) responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. In addition, timelines identified for completion of some activities have not been met. The district needs to identify new timelines and implement the identified activities by those newly determined dates. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 area of parents and/or adult student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of access to confidential records. On-site monitoring activities determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding procedures for providing a list of records maintained by the district and staff knowledge of procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because, although the plan identifies the staff member(s)**

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**responsible for oversight, no specific oversight activities were identified. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other records.

### **Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Locations of Other Records** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and/or adult students are aware of the locations of other records maintained by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Eastern Regional School District on January 7, 8, and 9, 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 district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the implementation of activities to bring about correction in some areas prior to the on-site and for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated positive trends regarding placement of students with disabilities in general education settings. Data submitted by the district indicated that placement in general education settings is above the state average. In addition, the number of students in public and/or private separate settings has decreased. The district attributes this, in part, to the establishment of the Chance Program, an in-district program for students with behavior disabilities. In addition to these positive trends, the district has identified a need for more supplemental aids and services to support classified students in regular education. The district has addressed this need through their improvement plan.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed a level of satisfaction with the district's variety of programs and services. Concerns were raised regarding extended school year, provision of in-class support services, collaborative planning time for resource teachers, scheduling and the impact on special education programs, procedures for ensuring implementation of accommodations and modifications in regular education programs, and a need for increased communication between parents and staff. The majority of the issues raised by parents 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, length of school day/year, facilities, written notice, procedures for conducting independent evaluations, procedures for processing direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meetings, eligibility meetings, annual review timelines, age of majority, access to regular education programs, agency involvement in transition planning, suspension tracking, procedures for conducting manifestation determinations, procedures for placing students in interim alternative education settings, participation in statewide assessments or alternate assessments, IEP documentation of graduation requirements, written notice of graduation, age range, group size for speech therapy, and procedures for parent/adult student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional, paraprofessional, and parent development, special education policies and procedures, transfer procedures, provision of related services, certification, extended school year, consent for reevaluation, notice of a meeting, parent/district communication, surrogate parents, Child Find procedures, overrepresentation, pre-referral procedures, health summaries and vision/hearing screenings, reevaluation and initial evaluation timelines, teacher participation at meetings, eligibility criteria, provision of evaluation

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reports to parents, IEP components, goals and objectives, procedures for revising IEPs and providing copies to parents, individualized decision-making, justification for removal from regular education, consideration of the need for supplemental aids and services, continuum of services, participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, courses of study, student invitations to meetings, provision of programs that promote successful transition, determination of student interests and preferences, IEP documentation of transition components, procedures for transitioning students from grade eight to grade nine, procedures for reducing discipline referrals, documentation of removals to case managers, development of behavior intervention plans, accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, testing proficiency levels, class size, homebound instruction, resource programs, equitable participation by non-public students, collaborative planning time for resource teachers, case management for transition, descriptions of special class programs, procedures for documenting access to confidential records, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding native language, procedures for informing regular education teachers of IEP responsibilities and documentation of the location of other pupil records.

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