

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

**District:** Elsinboro School District

**County:** Salem

**Monitoring Dates:** January 13, 2005

**Monitor:** Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards

***Background Information:***

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Elsinboro School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Elsinboro 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Elsinboro 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 Elsinboro School on the evening of December 2, 2004. 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, chief school administrator/building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The Elsinboro School District is commended for the variety of academic enrichment programs available to all students, including those with disabilities. Students participate in the 100 Book Challenge, a grant-funded program, which encourages students to spend time each day reading and provides incentives for accomplishing reading goals. School personnel and parents report that this program has established a strong community of readers. In addition to daily reading, all students are required to produce one publishable piece of writing each marking period. All students have the opportunity

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to participate in other academic programs including the National Geographic Bowl and the annual Science Fair.

### ***Data Summary:***

A review of the data submitted by the Elsinboro School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that over the last three years, the district's classification rate has decreased to approximately 12%, which is below the state average classification rate. Despite this positive trend, the district's improvement plan includes the development of an Intervention & Referral Services committee which the district anticipates will help to continue this positive trend.

A further review of the data indicates that over the last three years, placement trends for students in general education more than 80% of the school day have dropped by 23.2%. At the same time, placement rates for students in general education between 40 and 80% of the day have increased by almost 12%. The district has identified provision of a continuum of services as an area of need and has addressed the issue in their improvement plan.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of policies and procedures. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding professional development for general and special education teachers. **Although the district has begun to implement activities in this area, the improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding workshop opportunities for parents.

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

**Workshop Opportunities for Parents**—During the on-site monitoring, interviews with school personnel indicate that there is a need for training and training opportunities for parents.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that training opportunities are provided for parents of students with**

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disabilities. The district must conduct a needs assessment to determine areas of need. In addition, the plan must include a mechanism for determining the effectiveness of any training efforts. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents have opportunities to learn about special education polices and practices to become more informed participants in the special education process.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment, process, the district identified concerns in the area of counseling goals and objectives and hearing aids. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding maintenance of hearing aids. The district also identified concerns regarding the provision of speech-language services. **Speech services are currently limited to an after-school program where parents must choose to either provide their own transportation to and from the school, or to decline services. The district failed to submit activities to address this area. The district must develop improvement plan activities to ensure the provision of a free, appropriate public education, including all necessary related services.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding oversight of IEP implementation, extended school year, and duration of speech-language services.

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

**Oversight of IEP Implementation** –During the on-site monitoring it was determined that teachers are not consistently implementing accommodations and modifications required by student IEPs.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that required accommodations and modifications are provided in the classroom as required in student IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students have the opportunity to succeed in general education classrooms with the supports they need as determined by IEP teams. The improvement plan must include in-service training for classroom teachers and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Extended School Year** –During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the need for extended school year is not 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. Implementation of these activities will ensure that students who require services in the summer, due to regression and recoupment issues, will receive them. The improvement plan must include in-service training for**

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**school personnel and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Duration of Speech-language Services** –During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the duration of speech-language services is not consistently identified in the IEP.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs include the frequency of speech services. The implementation of these activities will ensure that IEP teams make a collaborative decision about the amount of speech services that a student requires. 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 native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding components of notice of a meeting. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction for notices provided by the child study team. **However, the improvement plan is insufficient to address notices provided by the speech-language specialist because it lacks an administrative oversight component. In addition the plan needs to be revised to include the following additional missing elements for notices of speech meetings: purpose, time, location, and participants for initial identification meetings and provision of Parent Rights in Special Education (P.R.I.S.E.).**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice for initial speech evaluations.

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

**Initial Speech-Language Evaluations**—During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that although identification meetings are held when a speech referral is made, written notice following the meeting does not include all the required elements. Notice does identify the action and a request for consent, but it does not include an explanation of the action, options considered and/or rejected, and other factors relevant to the proposal. In addition, copies of N.J.A.C 6A:14 and 1:6A are not provided. File review and interviews also indicate that although written notice is provided and consent is requested, documentation of these activities is not consistently maintained in the student record.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice of the intent to conduct a speech evaluation includes all the required components, including the provision of N.J.A.C.**

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**6A:14 and 1:6A.** In addition, the plan must include activities to ensure that copies of written notice and parental consent are maintained by the district. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being fully informed as to the actions for which the district is requesting consent, as well as a description of their parental rights. 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 direct referrals, summer referrals, vision/hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding Child Find activities. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding referral procedures and establishment of an intervention and referral services committee. The district has developed procedures, established the committee and begun to implement these activities. **However, the district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that these new procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component. In addition, in-service training has not been provided for the staff and members of the committee as outlined in the plan.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants.

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

**Meeting Participants**—During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that a general education teacher is not a participant at identification, eligibility, and IEP meetings for students referred for speech and language problems. Meetings are held after school hours and teachers do not have the opportunity to participate. In addition, when a child is referred to the child study team with language concerns or a preschooler is referred, the speech-language specialist does not attend the identification meeting.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all the require participants are in attendance at identification, eligibility, and IEP meetings. The implementation of these activities will ensure that all required decision-makers are in attendance and have input into the determinations made. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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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 standardized evaluations, bilingual evaluations, and documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of evaluation reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of signed and dated evaluation reports. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area. The district further identified concerns regarding components of speech-language evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures. In addition the plan needs to be revised to ensure that evaluation reports include a parent interview and a review of interventions.**

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 compliance in the area of three-year timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of student's last year in preschool.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedures for dismissals from speech.

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Speech Dismissals**—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that a reevaluation is not conducted when considering dismissal for students eligible for speech-language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a reevaluation is conducted prior to dismissing students eligible for speech-language services. The implementation of these activities will ensure that appropriate information is considered prior to determining the eligibility status of speech students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Section VII: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of statements of eligibility for students with a specific learning disability (SLD) and for students eligible for speech-language services. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to correct statements of eligibility for students with SLD. **However, the improvement plan is insufficient to address the issue for students eligible for speech and language services because the plan lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that activities are implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding certification of agreement/disagreement, participants at eligibility meetings (see Section IV), and provision of evaluation reports to parents.

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

**Certification of Agreement/Disagreement**—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that written notice of eligibility does not include a certification of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that notice of eligibility includes a certification of agreement/disagreement with the eligibility determination. The implementation of these activities will ensure that district personnel have an opportunity to state in writing whether they agree or disagree with eligibility determinations and to provide a rationale for their disagreement. As a result, parents will be fully informed of differing opinions regarding these eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Provision of Evaluation Reports**—During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that speech evaluation reports are not provided to parents prior to the eligibility conference.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that speech evaluation reports are provided to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. The implementation of these activities will result in parents being having the opportunity to review evaluation results prior to the conference. As a result, they will be able to fully participate in making any eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives and their alignment with

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the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), age of majority, and annual review and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of required IEP components. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities that have corrected IEPs for students eligible for special education and related services. **However, IEPs for students eligible for speech-language services continue to lack required components. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative component to ensure that required changes are made. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at IEP meetings (see Section IV) and implementation dates.

**Implementation Dates**—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that students eligible for speech-language services do not have IEPs in effect at the start of the school year. IEPs from the previous year expire in June and new IEPs are not developed until after the new school year begins, resulting in a delay in the provision of services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all students eligible for speech-language services have a current IEP in effect at the start of each school year. The implementation of these activities will result in students receiving required services promptly at the start of the school year. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of access to general education.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extra-curricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding continuum of programs. The district currently offers only pull-out services and no in-class support options. Barriers to compliance include increased enrollment with accompanying staffing and funding issues. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks activities and procedures to ensure that placement decisions are made on an individualized basis. In addition, the plan needs to include in-service training for staff members. The plan needs to be revised to include these activities.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding consideration of supplemental aids and services.



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

**Consideration of Supplemental Aids and Services/General Education**—During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the need for supplemental aids and services as well as placement in general education as a first option are not consistently considered and documented for all students with disabilities.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the need for supplemental aids and services and placement in general education is considered and documented for all students. The implementation of these activities will potentially increase the number of students with disabilities who have the opportunity to benefit from instruction that is based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards in a general education setting with their peers. The improvement plan must include in-service training for staff members and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and implementation of IEPs by age three.

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 student and agency invitations and student interests and preferences.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of statements of transition service needs. 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.

### ***Section XI: Discipline***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, manifestation determination, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, procedures for short-term and long-term removals, and procedures for placement in interim alternative educational settings (IAES).

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During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of case manager notification of student suspensions. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an oversight component to ensure that procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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 group sizes for speech therapy, common planning time, special class descriptions, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size and age range waivers. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 access sheets and procedures for destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the area of procedures for granting parent and adult students' access to records. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this issue because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that procedures are consistently implemented. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding maintenance of pupil records.

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

**Maintenance of Pupil Records**—During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that confidential records for students eligible for speech-language services are maintained in a filing cabinet with no lock. As a result, confidentiality of these records cannot be assured. In addition, the special education teacher does not have copies of IEPs because she does not have a locking filing cabinet or other secure place to store the records. As a result, the special education teacher does not have sufficient access to IEPs.

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- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all records for students with disabilities are maintained in a secure location and that special education staff have available access to IEPs. The implementation of these activities will ensure that only authorized personnel have access to confidential records and that instructional staff have ready access to educational information. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Elsinboro School District on January 13, 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 acknowledged for the 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 also commended for the 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 data indicates that the district has made progress towards reducing the classification rate, which is expected to continue with the implementation of the Intervention and Referral Services committee. Additional data, however, indicate that students are spending a greater portion of their school day in separate settings. The district has identified this as an area of need and has addressed the issue in the improvement plan.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, one parent and several staff members attended and expressed satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. A concern was raised regarding extended school year.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included **Statewide Assessment** and **Graduation**.

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, provision of related services, length of school day/year, transfer procedures, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral procedures, evaluations, reevaluations, eligibility determination, IEP development, IEP documentation, IEP revisions, age of majority, timelines for annual reviews, initial evaluations, and reevaluations, access to general education, participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of services, preschool transition, transition from school to post-school, discipline, statewide assessments, graduation, provision of programs and services, 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 NJDOE are policies and procedures, goals and objectives for counseling, Child Find, signed and dated reports, statements of transition service needs, class size, and age range.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, maintenance of hearing aids, provision of speech language services, surrogate parents, notice of a meeting, referral procedures and pre-intervention strategies, components of speech evaluations, statements of eligibility, IEP components, continuum of programs, case manager notification of suspensions, and procedures for granting parents access to records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding parent training, oversight of IEP implementation, extended school year, IEP documentation of speech services, consent, prior written notice for speech evaluations, meeting participants for speech, provision of procedural safeguards, speech reevaluations, certification of agreement/disagreement, provision of speech evaluation reports to parents, IEP implementation dates, consideration of supplemental aids and services, consideration of placement in general education, and procedures for maintaining confidential records.

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