

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

**District:** Essex County Vocational School District      **County:** Essex

**Monitoring Dates:** April 6, 12 & 27, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Nicole Buten, Vanessa Leonard & Kim Murray

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

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Essex County Vocational School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Essex County Vocational Schools with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Essex County Vocational 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.

A focus group meeting for parents and community members was held on April 6, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting and through phone interviews with parents was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit. Five parents attended the focus group meeting. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Several parents stated that they were pleased with the variety of programs offered by the vocational school. Parents expressed that they were welcome members of the IEP teams.

During the on-site visit, the monitoring team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of student, teachers, related services personnel, and other relevant information, including all special education student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's director of special education, child study team members, general education teachers, special education teachers and related services providers.

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### **Data Summary:**

A review of the district's special education data indicated that 86% of the district's special education students are included in the general education setting for less than 40% of the school day. In an effort to increase the number of students participating in general education classes, the district applied for and was awarded a local capacity-building grant. The funds from this grant were primarily utilized to hire additional special education instructors who were assigned to co-teach in general education classes. In addition, funds were utilized for supplies and in-service training regarding inclusion. Furthermore, the district developed an improvement plan to address general education access in the district that will also support the district's efforts in assuring that special education students are educated in the least restrictive environment.

Additionally, the district is commended for a 0% drop out rate for the 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 school years.

### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for their Transition Center. This program prepares students for transition to adult life focusing instruction on functional academics, community living, vocational skills and recreation. The students involved in this program spend a good part of each day learning and generalizing skills in the community. Community learning environments include: St. Barnabas Medical Center, Kessler Institute of Rehabilitation, Caldwell Library, Montclair State University, St. John's Soup Kitchen, the Hilton Hotel, Newark International Airport, supermarkets and restaurants and other local businesses.

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

Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records 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 areas of policies and procedures, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of staff training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

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

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of frequency, duration and location of related services, goals and objectives for related services, length of day/year and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of certification of staff members. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. Additionally, while the district initially identified concerns with extended school year, during the on-site review it was determined that the district has taken appropriate action to fully comply with requirements.

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 compliance in the areas of timelines, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings 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 area of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision and hearing screening and identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of direct referrals by district personnel. 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 V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

### ***Section VII: Eligibility***

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

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting participants, signatures of agreement/disagreement and statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of copy of the evaluation reports 10 days prior to a meeting and criteria for specific learning disabled students. 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 goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, present levels of educational performance statements, considerations and required statements, meeting participants, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copies of IEPs to parents, implementation of IEPs and teacher access/responsibility. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making, consideration of supplementary aids and services and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of regular education access in district. 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 self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of preferences and interests assessment and age 16- needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invite to a transition meeting. 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**

Special education monitoring was completed in the Essex County Vocational Technical School District on April 12 & 27, 2005. The purpose of this phase of the monitoring process 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant during the self-assessment and verified as such by the Office of Special Education Programs.

Reevaluation, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements, Programs and Services and Student Records were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held, several parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Several parents stated that they were pleased with the variety of programs offered by the vocational school. Parents expressed that they were a welcome members of the IEP teams.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, frequency, duration and location of related services, goals and objectives for related services, length of day/year, facilities, timelines, notices of meetings, written notices, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, vision and hearing screening, identification meetings, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, meeting participants for eligibility meetings, signatures of agreement/disagreement, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabled students, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, present levels of educational performance statements, considerations and required statements, meeting participants at IEP meetings, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making, consideration of supplementary aids and services, continuum of programs, preferences and interests statements and age 16-needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, certification of staff members, extended school year, surrogate parents, direct referrals by district personnel, acceptance/rejection of outside evaluations, copies of evaluation reports 10 days prior to a meeting, criteria for specific learning disabled students, copies of IEPs to parents, implementation of IEPs, teacher access/responsibility, regular education access in the district and student and agency invite to a transition meeting.

During the monitoring process, no additional areas of need were identified. The improvement plan originally submitted in June 2004 will be reviewed for final approval. Verification of implementation will be conducted by the County Office of Education.

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