

**NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL EDUCATION MONITORING**

**District:** Franklin Township

**County:** Somerset

**Monitoring Dates:** November 20, 21, 27, 28, 2000

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards, Arleen Popovici, Patricia Fair.

**Background Information**

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Franklin 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 Franklin Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate its strength and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free and 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 Franklin Township School District developed an improvement plan to address the identified areas.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring visit to verify the issues identified, to address the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress made in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Simpson G. Smith School on November 13, 2000. From this initial focus group meeting, themes were identified that would later be verified during the on-site visit. In addition to these themes, information from previous monitoring activities was available to the team and helped to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, NJDOE team reviewed district documentation, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, and related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education director, building principals, and child study team members, including speech-language specialists. Input was also received from parents of students with disabilities. In addition, a number of the districts school buildings were visited and both special education and general education teachers were interviewed.

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District compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the New Jersey Administrative Code for Special Education (N.J.A.C. 6A:14) was assessed. Areas identified by the district as compliant were investigated and analyzed to verify compliance. Systemic areas of need are identified in the findings below.

**District Strengths:**

The district provides an integrated preschool program for three and four year old students as well as an adaptive physical education program for all preschoolers.

The district provides after school tutorial services in a program called Project Success, for both regular education and special education students. This program enables these students to obtain extra help in a variety of subject areas. To ensure high quality instruction, the district employs appropriately certified regular education and special education teachers to support the students in this program.

**I. General Provisions**

**Summary of Findings:**

The Franklin Township Board of Education has not yet adopted the Policies/Statement of Assurances required by the New Jersey Department of Education. The district is currently in the process of developing procedures to implement policies as required by OSEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need for additional staff development and training on a variety of special education issues. In addition, there were concerns identified regarding procedures for providing access to public information and submission of annual reports required under the IDEA. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the policies and procedures issue.

**Areas of Need:**

**Staff Development** - During the self-assessment process, the district identified a need for additional staff development initiatives on a variety of special education topics. In addition, the district indicated a need for follow-up activities to evaluate the effectiveness of training and to ensure implementation. However, the district's improvement plan does not address these follow-up activities.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include a mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of the training as well as identify follow-up activities for staff development initiatives.

**Access to Public Information** - During the self-assessment process, the district indicated a need to consistently make available to parent's information regarding the

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district's eligibility under Part B of IDEA. Although this was identified as a need, improvement plan activities were not included.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that, upon request, parents are provided with all public documents relating to the district's eligibility under Part B of the IDEA.

**Annual Reports** - During the self-assessment process, the district indicated that annual reports required under the IDEA are not consistently provided. This includes, but is not limited to, reports of students with disabilities who are exiting education; subject to suspensions and expulsions; removed to interim alternative education settings; and participating in statewide assessments. Although this was identified as a need, the improvement plan did not include activities to address this issue.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the submission of annual reports as required by the IDEA.

## **II. F. A. P. E.**

### **Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance in the area of length of school day and school year.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, related services, transfer procedures, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in non-academic and extra curricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address most issues regarding related services.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the monitoring of IEP implementation, start and end dates for related services, documentation of related services, and facilities.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Extended School Year** – ESY services are considered, discussed, and provided for preschool students and those students attending out-of-district placements, only.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure ESY programs are considered and discussed for all classified students and provided based on the individual needs of those students. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure these considerations are appropriately documented in each IEP.

**Non-academic and extracurricular activities** - The district does not consistently include students with disabilities in non-academic and extracurricular activities conducted before, during, and after school.

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- The district is directed to revise their improvement plan to ensure that students with disabilities are included in non-academic and extracurricular activities, as appropriate.

**Related Services** – On-site monitoring identified the need to maintain documentation of the provision of related services.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure documentation of the provision of related services.

**Transfer Students** - The district identified concerns regarding transfer procedures because principals are not fully aware of these policies, procedures and code requirements resulting in a failure to appropriately place students when they transfer into the district.

- The district is directed to revise their improvement plan to ensure that principals are provided with the necessary information to ensure the timely and appropriate implementation of transfer procedures.

**Monitoring IEPs** - On-site monitoring determined that clerical errors resulting in missing or inaccurate information regarding programs and services were made while entering information into IEPs. As a result of these errors, students did not always receive the services discussed, proposed, and agreed to at IEP meetings.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the accuracy of information included in IEPs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures.

**Facilities** - On-site monitoring identified the dual use of classes in the Connerly and Hillcrest schools. The county office has been notified of this situation.

### **III. Procedural Safeguards**

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

The district accurately assessed compliance in the areas of independent evaluations, policies and procedures manual and written notice within 20 days.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with surrogate parents, obtaining consent, age of majority, transition, providing interpreters, documenting attempts to secure parent participation, and notice in native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address all areas in this section except native language.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site regarding notice of a meeting and meeting participants.

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**Areas of Need:**

**Notice of a Meeting** – During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding notice of a meeting for 14 and 16 year old students. However, on-site monitoring identified an additional concern with other notices. Specifically, notices of IEP meeting and annual review meetings do not include the statement that the parent may invite a person with special expertise to these meeting.

- The district is directed to revise its notices to ensure the inclusion of all required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

**Native Language**– During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding the provision of written notice and conducting meetings in the native language of the parent, when feasible.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that written notice is provided in the language that is understood by the parents, when feasible, and meetings are conducted in the native language of the parents, when feasible.

**Meeting Participants** – During on-site monitoring, it was determined that participants identified on the notice of a meeting did not always match the signatures of participants who actually attended those meetings.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the participants identified on the notice of a meeting actually attend those meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure full compliance with this activity.

#### **IV. Location, Referral and Identification**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately identified compliance with written procedures to locate, refer and evaluate students ages three through twenty-one, including students attending non-public schools who reside within the district.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding an overrepresentation of minority students referred for special education services, the dissemination of child find information, procedures for providing and documenting pre-referral interventions, an inconsistency in complying with meeting timelines, participation of speech/language specialists at preschool identification meetings, and inconsistency in conducting hearing screenings as part of the initial evaluation process. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address documentation of interventions in the general education setting, and child find procedures.

**Areas of Need:**

**Initial Preschool Referral Process** - During the self-assessment process, the district identified that they do not consistently convene a meeting within 20 calendar days of

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receipt of the written request for an evaluation. They also indicated they do not consistently include a speech/language specialist as a member of the child study team when the student is of preschool age. In addition, they indicated that they do not consistently provide notice of a meeting, and they do not consistently provide written notice of the determinations made at the identification meeting.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that identification meetings are conducted within 20 days of the referral. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure provision of the notice of the meeting as well as the provision of written notice of the determinations made at that meeting within 15-days.
- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that speech/language specialists are included at the identification meeting as members of the child study team when preschool age students are referred for initial evaluations

**Hearing Screenings** – The district has identified that they do not consistently conduct audiometric screenings when a student is referred to the child study team.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure each student referred to the child study team receives an audiometric screening.

**Overrepresentation** – The district has identified that there is an overrepresentation of minority students being referred for evaluation for special education and related services.

- To assist the district in its review and analysis of data to determine the factors that may be contributing to this overrepresentation of minorities in special education, the district will participate in technical assistance sessions sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs during the 2001-2002 school year.

## **V. Protection in Evaluation Procedures**

### **Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance with obtaining parental consent for evaluation, conducting multi-disciplinary assessments, the use of standardized assessments, and preparation of written reports of findings that are signed and dated by the evaluators.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding assessment in the native language of the student, appropriate use of assessments for students with sensory impairments, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, and completion of the evaluation process within ninety-days of obtaining parental consent. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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**VI.     Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance in the areas of planning meetings and documenting attempts to obtain parental consent prior to conducting additional assessments as part of a reevaluation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding compliance with three-year reevaluation timelines.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants. This area of need was addressed in Section III - Procedural Safeguards.

**Areas of Need:**

**Three-Year Timelines** – The district indicated that they do not consistently meet timelines for reevaluation. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure reevaluations are conducted within three years of the previous determination of eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure full implementation of these procedures.

**VII.    Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately identified compliance with eligibility meetings and the provision of evaluation reports in a timely manner.

During the self-assessment the district identified areas of need regarding notice of a meeting, meeting participants, distribution of reports, timelines, and assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

**VIII.   Individual Education Program**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately identified compliance in the areas of annual review timelines, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, and informing parents of progress in the identified goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process the district identified many areas of need regarding IEP meeting timelines, participants, vocational personnel, written notice, providing copies of the IEP, implementing IEPs for preschoolers, having IEPs in effect prior to the provision of services at the beginning of each school year, parental observations of

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proposed placements, staff access to IEPs, and responsibility and required components and statements in the IEP. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses all areas with the exception of meeting participants.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding the inconsistent identification of the duration of services in the IEP.

**Areas of Need:**

**Participants** – The district identified issues regarding the participation of general education teachers at IEP meetings. The district also identified the need to be more consistent in inviting the student to a meeting when appropriate. The district further determined that they need to be more consistent with their efforts to invite a representative of agencies that are likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the consistent participation of general education teachers at IEP meetings, and to ensure representatives from other agencies that are likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services are invited to attend IEP meetings. The plan must include a mechanism to document attempts to ensure attendance of agency representatives in the event a representative does not attend.

**Duration of Services** – A review of IEPs indicated they do not consistently document the duration of related services although the district IEP format allows for the notation of this information.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure IEPs document the frequency, location, and duration of related services.

**IX. Least Restrictive Environment**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance in the areas of the provision of supplemental aides and services and the provision of services identified in the Oberti decision.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of making available a full continuum of programs and services and making individualized decisions regarding student programs and placements.

**Areas of Need:**

**Continuum of Programs/Decision-making Process** – The district indicated that they lack space for programs for students with autism and severe cognitive impairments and that placement in an early childhood class with appropriate supplemental aides and services is not consistently considered as the first placement option. The district further indicated the decision-making process was negatively impacted by factors that include category of disability, lack of available space, and financial constraints.



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- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure a full continuum of placement options is available to meet the needs of those students identified in the self-assessment and that decisions are made based on the individual needs of students. The plan must include a component to ensure the removal of those barriers that limit the consideration of some placement options.

**X. Transition**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district identified the statement of transition services is not consistently based on the individual student's needs. The district also indicated that they do not consistently develop IEPs that contain a statement of the transition service needs and preferences of the student, or the technical support needed from other agencies. The district has identified that they do not consistently reconvene an IEP meeting when an outside agency fails to provide the transition services to meet the student's transition objectives. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the self-assessment process the district indicated it does not ensure a smooth transition from early intervention to preschool. A child study team member does not consistently participate in the preschool transition planning conference. Preschoolers do not consistently have their IEPs implemented by age three. The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need.

**Areas of Need:**

**Transition to Preschool-** During the self-assessment process, the district identified it did not ensure placement in a preschool program by the age of three, and did not send representatives to the transition planning conference. The district has indicated that they need to hire additional child study team members in order to consistently provide preschool transition services.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include the procedures these additional staff members will follow to ensure participation of a child study team member at EIP transition planning meetings. The plan must also include procedures to ensure the consistent implementation of IEP's by the child's third birthday.

**XI. Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance in the area of having a discipline code in place for all students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified all areas of discipline as non-compliant. The district developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses all

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areas of need in this section with the exception of the identification of an Interim Alternative Education Setting (IAES).

**Areas of Need**

**IAES** – During the self-assessment process the district indicated they have not identified an IAES settings for students removed in response to offenses involving weapons, controlled substances and/or students who are a danger to themselves or others.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the identification of appropriate IAES for students requiring this type of placement option.

**XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately assessed compliance with student participation in statewide assessments and IEP documentation of the decision-making process and required accommodations and modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding the SRA process and child study team knowledge of the content of assessments and appropriate accommodations and modifications. Though the improvement plan contains activities to address these areas of need, it is recommended the district include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training it proposes to provide to staff members.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding alternative assessments.

**Areas of Need:**

**Alternative Assessments**—During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs and interviews with staff members indicated that IEPs do not identify an alternative assessment when students are exempted from participating in statewide assessments.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the adoption of an alternate assessment until such time as OSEP develops one. The plan must include a mechanism to ensure that assessment is identified in the IEP.

**XIII. Graduation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding IEP documentation and participation in graduation activities.

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

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**Areas of Need:**

**IEP Documentation**—During the self-assessment process, the district indicated that IEPs for students do not address graduation requirements as required. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its IEP format to include this information. It is recommended the district adopt the state's model IEP.

**Participation**—During the self-assessment process, the district indicated that students attending out-of-district placements are not consistently made aware of their right to participate in graduation exercises and to receive a district issued diploma. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this area of need.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to include procedures to inform students enrolled in out-of-district placements of their rights regarding participation in graduation exercises and their right to receive a district issued diploma.

**Written Notice**—During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff members indicated that written notice of graduation is not consistently provided as required.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure the provision of written notice prior to graduation.

#### **XIV. Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately identified compliance with employment of appropriately certified child study team members, preschool programs, resource programs, occupational therapy, physical therapy and home instruction.

During self-assessment the district identified concerns with insufficient numbers of child study team members, provision of case management services, insufficient planning time between regular and special education teachers, the responsibilities of resource center teachers, and the descriptions of special class programs. In addition there were concerns regarding the student to staff ratios in programs for students with autism, severe and profound cognitive disabilities, and classes organized around a single content area. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address case management issues, staff shortages, and class sizes.

**Areas of Need:**

**Collaborative Planning Time** – During the self-assessment the school district reported that resource room teachers and self-contained classroom teachers do not have sufficient time to collaborate with general education staff.

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- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that special education and regular education staff have opportunities to plan appropriately for the students for whom they share educational responsibility.

**Special Education Program Descriptions** - During the self-assessment process the district has identified that they have neither developed nor submitted a description of each special class program that it provides to the county office of education.

- The district is directed to develop and submit a description of its special education programs to the county office for review and approval.

## **XV. Student Records**

### **Summary of Findings:**

The district accurately identified compliance with procedures for the inspection of student records by parents and adult students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding access, amendments to records and documentation of location. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address access and amendments to records.

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

### **Areas of Need:**

**Documentation of Other Records** – On-site record review indicated that cumulative files do not document the location of other records.

- The district is directed to revise its improvement plan to ensure that cumulative records identify the location of other records maintained by the district.

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**SUMMARY**

An on-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Franklin Township School District on November 20, 21, 27, 28, 2000. The purpose of the monitoring was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district should be commended for the thorough and comprehensive review it conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to self-identify the majority of areas that require improvement as well as develop a comprehensive improvement plan, that with some revision, should result in systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In addition, many of the concerns expressed by parents at the meeting had been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

The on-site visit determined that the district provides special education and related services as required by IEPs; employs appropriately certified personnel; provides independent evaluations upon request; provides written notice within 20 days; has written procedures to locate, refer and evaluate students ages three through twenty-one; conducts multi-disciplinary assessments; develops goals and objectives that are aligned with the core curriculum content standards; and ensures student participation in statewide assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development; access to public information; extended school year; related services; facilities; meeting participants; child find activities; the referral process; notice and evaluation timelines; continuum of services; individualized decision-making processes; discipline; alternative assessments; and components of the IEP.

The on-site visit further identified areas of need within the various standards regarding participation in extracurricular activities; related services; and the provision of written notice.

Within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district is required to revise its improvement plan to address these additional areas of need and to resubmit the revised plan to the Office of Special Education Programs.