

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

**District:** Freehold Township School District

**County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Dates:** October 10, 2003 and January 12, 2004

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

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Freehold 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 Freehold Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and areas of need with regard to:

- The provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
- The protection of procedural safeguards for students and their families;
- The development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and,
- The organization and delivery of programs and services resulting in positive student outcomes.

The self-assessment was designed to identify areas of strength, promising practices, areas that need improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Freehold Township School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, to assess the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Freehold Township School District on September 18, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for developing the GEPA Academy. This voluntary after-school program is open to regular and special education students as a means of preparing them for GEPA testing. Instruction is provided on the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards and testing strategies. In addition, the district offers the Circle of Friends program at the elementary level. This program promotes positive social interactions between classified and non-classified students in structured non-academic settings.

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

**Reevaluation, Discipline and Statewide Assessment** 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.

***Data Summary:***

The Freehold Township School District has a classification rate of 10.9%, which is below the state average of 13.4%. These data may be related to the on-site findings in the area of child find and/or to the district's findings in the area of supplementary aids and services. During the 2001-2002, 42% of classified students were educated in a general education setting for more than 80% of the day. While this is on par with the state average, it does represent a 5% increase from the 2000-2001 school year. In 2003, all preschool disabled students were placed in a self-contained environment. During the self-assessment process the district recognized the need for more placement options for the preschool disabled population and developed an improvement plan to address this area of need. In September 2004, the district opened a typical preschool which affords more placement options for students.

***Section I: General Provisions***

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures and public information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)***

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of related services, length of school day and year, transfer students and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, participants, notices in native language, independent evaluations and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of notice early enough to ensure parental participation and the selection and training 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 themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings.

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

An additional area of concern was identified regarding Child Find.

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

**Child Find** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that while the district has policies in place to locate and identify students who are enrolled in district schools and students between the ages of three and five, the district is not implementing activities to identify and locate students enrolled in nonpublic schools or students who are migrant or homeless.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure it implements child find activities to locate and identify students in nonpublic schools, and students who are migrant or homeless. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all students who may need special education and related services are located and identified to the district.**

### **Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of functional assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants at eligibility meetings, criteria for specific learning disability and copy of evaluation reports to 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 VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of notices, goals and objectives aligned with core content curriculum standards, implementation dates and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants and considerations and required statements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access, individualized decision making and nonacademic and extra-curricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum of placement options, documentation of consideration of the least restrictive environment and supplementary aids and services. 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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**Section X: Transition to Post-School**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

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

**Section X: Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention program to preschool disabled by age 3.

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

**Section XIII: Graduation**

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

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class sizes, age ranges, aides, group sizes for speech therapy, schedules, home instruction and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of consultation time. 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 XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of other locations of student records. 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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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Freehold Township School District on October 10, 2003 and January 12, 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 this review the district was able to identify all but one area of need and develop an improvement plan that will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

The Freehold Township School District has a classification rate of 10.9%, which is below the state average of 13.4%. The district has increased the number of students placed in general education for more than 80% of the day by 5% over the last three years. The district recognizes the need for more placement options for students with disabilities at all grade levels and has begun to address this area of concern by opening an inclusive preschool classroom.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, seven parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. General consensus was that parents are satisfied with the quality of education being provided to their children. In addition, parents stated that they were involved in the decision-making process and considered themselves valuable members of the IEP team. Concerns were voiced concerning the district's ability to educate more severely disabled student in-district, the expansion of in-class support offerings, the training of regular education teachers on inclusion and budgetary issues impacting program offerings. One parent expressed concern over the lack of "readability" of IEPs and the ability of parents to participate meaningfully in their child's program when they cannot understand the language of the IEP document.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, public information, related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, timelines, participants, notices in native language, independent evaluations, age of majority, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings, consent, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, eligibility meetings, notice of eligibility, documentation of eligibility, notices, goals and objectives aligned with core content curriculum standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, regular education access, individualized decision making, nonacademic and extra-curricular participation, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention program to preschool disabled by age 3, class sizes, age ranges, aides, group sizes for speech therapy, schedules, home instruction, certifications, access, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, extended school year, provision of notice early enough to ensure parental participation, selection and training of surrogate parents, pre-referral interventions, health summaries, functional assessments, participants at eligibility meetings, criteria for specific learning disability, copy of evaluation reports to parents, participants, considerations and required statements, continuum of placement options, documentation of consideration of the least restrictive environment, supplementary aids and services, consultation time, and documentation of other locations of student records.

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The on-site visit identified an additional area of need within the various standards regarding Child Find.

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