

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

**District:** Harrison School District

**County:** Hudson

**Monitoring Dates:** June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Carol Raff and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Harrison School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Harrison 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 **Harrison 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 Lincoln School on May 20, 2004. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

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

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for developing and implementing an after school program for students with disabilities in grades K through five. The program, otherwise known as 'CHIP', provides counseling on matters of conflict resolution, self esteem, peer pressure as well as homework instruction. Additionally, the Lincoln School parent's group formed a program called 'Skate' which stands for Spreading Kindness and Thoughtfulness

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Everywhere. This project recognizes and rewards students who display positive behaviors.

The district has created a video in both English and Spanish describing the services available to students with disabilities. This video is available for viewing at Parent-Teacher Association meetings.

### **Data Summary:**

2003 data indicate that 11% of students in special education spend more than 80% of their school day in general education as compared to the state average of 41.6%. This is significantly lower than the state's average. Further, 32% of the preschool disabled population is currently educated in a separate public and private school setting which is significantly higher than the state average of approximately 10%. On-site monitoring activities identified areas of need in the decision-making process, the continuum and the lack of supports and services as issues that are impacting the district's ability to provide educational services to students in the least restrictive environment.

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

***Graduation Requirements*** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of staff and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 length of school day and year and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, hearing aids, provision of programs and related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in the latter two areas.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding location for related services and programs and facilities. The county office has been notified of the facilities issues.

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

**Location of Services/Programs** – Based on a review of records it was determined the district does not identify the location of the provision of related services or the provision of special education programs in the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that ensure the documentation of a statement which specifies the location of where special education programs and services will be provided. Implementation of these activities will ensure students receive the programs and services in an environment that was agreed on by the members of the IEP team.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of notices in native language. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in this area. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 child find, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions and health summaries. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction regarding pre-referral interventions and health summaries.

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

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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 multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments functional assessments, written reports signed and dated and bilingual evaluations

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance and rejection of reports.

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Acceptance and Rejection of Reports** – Based on a review of records and staff interviews, it was determined the district is not documenting acceptance or rejection of reports and assessments from CST members or specialists from other public agencies, approved clinics or agencies or professionals in private practice.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure team members accept or reject all or parts of reports submitted from outside agencies. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of the reports that are included in the student’s file as well as afford them the opportunity to dispute any decision regarding the district’s rejection of all or parts of reports. The plan must include an administrative oversight to ensure implementation of this activity.**

**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and participants and reevaluation completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student’s last year in pre-school.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of three year timelines. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 meeting participants, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the provision of a copy of speech evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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

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

**Criteria** – A review of records and interviews indicated that the district has not adopted a statistical formula for determining a severe discrepancy.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure the district adopts a statistical formula to determine a severe discrepancy for the classification of Specific Learning Disability. Implementation of this activity will ensure only those students who meet the eligibility criteria for SLD are identified as such. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents and ninety- day timelines.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of meetings and participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards and teacher access and responsibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in the area of behavioral goals and objectives.

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 area of notification and participation of out-of-district nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding regular education access for in-district preschool students, decision-making process, least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and continuum of programs.

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

**Regular Education Access** – A review of records and staff interviews indicated that the pre-school disabled program is located in a separate building. Therefore, though these students are in-district, they still have no access to general education students and services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure pre-school students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. Implementation of these activities will ensure preschool disabled students have access to activities, including academic, nonacademic and extracurricular, with their non-disabled peer group. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

**Least Restrictive Environment Issues** – A review of records and interviews indicated that because there are a limited number of program options in special education and because there are limited supports and services in general education, placement decisions are based on the availability of programs and not on the individual needs of students. These areas are evidenced in the district's placement data which reflects limited placement of disabled students in general education settings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure students are afforded the opportunity to remain in general education settings with appropriate supports and services. These activities must include a needs assessment to determine the types of supports and services and programs that are needed as well as staff development to ensure the success of these expanded or newly developed programs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all students with disabilities receive the supports and services they require to be successfully educated with their non-disabled peers in general education settings. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of age fourteen and age sixteen transition service needs, preferences and interests and student agency invite. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

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**Section X: Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district identified themselves compliant in the areas of transition to preschool disabled by age three and participation in EIP planning meetings.

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

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, behavioral intervention plan, forty- five day return and procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

**Section XII: Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodation and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessments and process for exemption from passing.

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

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

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range waivers, group sizes for speech and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size waivers and consultation time. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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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 and requests, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

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

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of other locations** – During the on-site visit a review of records indicated that central files do not identify where other student records are located.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that central files identify the locations of other records maintained by the district. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents and adult students are aware of and can access these files.**



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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the **Harrison School District** on June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations as well as the implementation of activities to bring about correction in many of the areas of noncompliance.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. The parents indicated that their children do in fact, receive a high quality education as shown by an improvement in their reading and writing skills. Others felt that their children were being successfully prepared for post secondary educational choices and had the opportunity to participate in general education courses. One parent whose child attends an out-of-district program stated that she would like to be more involved in her child's educational program. Overall, the parents expressed favorable opinions of the department of special education and the district in general.

Data from 2003 indicates that the district has a relatively low percentage of special education students who are educated for more than 80% of their school day in general education settings. On-site monitoring activities identified a number of issues that are impacting the district's ability to provide services in the least restrictive environment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, frequency and duration of related services, length of day and year, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, content and provision of notices of meetings, content and provision of written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, meetings, child find, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, timelines and participants at identification meetings, multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meeting and participants, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEP's to parents, ninety-day timelines, notification and participation of out of district extracurricular activities, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention plan to preschool disabled by age three, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational settings, participation in statewide assessment, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, process for exemption from passing, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, age range waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access and requests for student records, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent training, extended school year, provision of programs, related services, transfer students, hearing aids, notices in native language, referral process, pre-referral interventions, health summary, three year reevaluation timelines, copy of speech evaluation to parents ten days prior to meeting, IEP meeting and participants, required Eligible for Speech Language Services statements, behavioral goals and objectives, teacher access and responsibility, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interest survey, age sixteen needed transition services, agency invite, documentation to case manager, behavioral intervention plan, forty five day return, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, staff knowledge of statewide assessments, class size waivers, and consultation time.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding location of related services and programs, acceptance and rejection of reports, statistical formula for SLD, issues related to placement in the least restrictive environment and documentation of other locations.

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