

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

**District:** High Bridge School District

**County:** Hunterdon

**Monitoring Dates:** June 7, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Barbara J. Tucker

### **Background Information:**

During the 2003–2004 school year, the High Bridge School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the High Bridge School District 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 High Bridge 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 High Bridge Elementary School, on June 7, 2005. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE monitor 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 administrators.

### **Data Summary:**

A review of the district data indicated the High Bridge School District's classification rate for students ages 3-21 has remained above the state average for the past three years. The district's placement data showed that between 2002 and 2004, an average of 49.4% of students with disabilities, ages 6 to 21, were educated in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day, while an average of only 14.4% of the district's preschool disabled population, was educated in general education, early childhood

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settings, in contrast to the state average of 41.6%. The district has acknowledged this as an area of need and has developed a preschool program that provides opportunities for inclusion.

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

General Provisions, Reevaluations, Discipline, Statewide Assessments 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 II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, provision of related services, goals and objectives documented in the IEP, length of day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of transfer students and hearing aides. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 consent, content and provision of written notices, translation, and interpreters at meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings, notices in native language and independent evaluations. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/staff, identification meetings, timelines/participants and the nature and scope of the interventions.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, referral process, health summary, vision/hearing screenings and documentation of the effectiveness of interventions. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary, standardized assessments, the educational impact statement for speech/language reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written reports signed/dated, acceptance /rejection of reports and functional assessments for speech/language. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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, criteria for severe learning discrepancy and statement of eligibility for severe learning discrepancy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of signatures of agreement/disagreement, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to meeting. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 meeting/participants, age of majority, 90-day timelines and annual review timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance (PLEPS), goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, timely implementation of IEPs, IEPs in effect beginning of school year, IEPs to parents and teacher access/responsibility. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 consideration of supplementary aids and services and notification and participation of out-of-district students.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making process, least restrictive environment, general education access for preschoolers, non-academic/extracurricular activities and continuum of programs. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of interests/preferences, student surveys/assessments, Statement of Needed Transition Services and student/agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Statement of Transition Service Needs and transition agency participation. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 compliance in the area of early intervention to pre-school disabled program by age 3.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of preschool transition planning conference. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in this area.

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

**Section XIII: Graduation**-The High Bridge School District services students from pre-kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and is not required to address issues of transition to post-school.

### **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of home instruction, sufficient staff, team teaching, class size/waivers, age range and waivers and group sizes for speech therapy.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and description of special class programs to county office. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance 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 themselves compliant in the areas of requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction, documentation of other record locations, parental rights and parental/adult student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of. Although the district initially identified these issues as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to appropriately implement specific activities to bring about compliance in these areas.

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 High Bridge School District on June 7, 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 High Bridge School District is highly commended for the outstanding accomplishment of identifying all areas of need during the self-assessment process and for developing an improvement plan that is sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of improvement plan activities which it has already undertaken to bring about compliance.

A review of the district data indicated that the High Bridge School District's classification rate for students ages 3-21 has remained above the state average for 3 years. The district acknowledged that although general education access for preschoolers is problematic, the improvement plan includes activities to address the issue.

At a focus group meeting held at the High Bridge Elementary School, several parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. In general, the district was praised for efforts to meet the individualized needs of special education students, for staff professionalism, availability of staff to address parental concerns, and for the district's "excellent services" provided to both students and their parents.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, staff/parent training and dissemination of IDEA Information, extended school year, provision of related services, goals and objectives documented in the IEP, length of day/year, facilities, certifications, consent, content/ provision for translation, written notices, content/provision, interpreters at meetings, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/staff, identification meetings, timelines/participants, the nature and scope of the interventions, the educational impact statement for speech/language reports and bilingual evaluations, meeting/participants, criteria for severe learning discrepancy and statement of eligibility for severe learning discrepancy, meeting/participants, age of majority, 90-day timelines, annual review timelines, consideration of supplementary aids/services, notification/participation of out-of-district students, interests/preferences, student surveys/assessments, Statement of Needed Transition Services, student/agency invitation, early intervention to pre-school disabled program by age 3, home instruction, sufficient staff, team teaching, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, requests, access sheets, maintenance/ destruction, documentation of other record locations, parental rights and parental/adult student access to records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding surrogate parents, notices of meetings, notices in native language and independent evaluations, child find, referral process, health summary, vision/hearing screenings and documentation of the effectiveness of interventions, written reports signed/dated, acceptance /rejection of reports, functional assessments for speech/language, signatures of agreement/disagreement, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to meeting, considerations /required statements, present levels of educational performance (PLEPS), goals/objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, timely implementation of IEPs, IEPs in effect beginning of school year, IEPs to parents, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, least

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restrictive environment, regular education access, non-academic/extracurricular activities and continuum of programs, Statement of Transition Service Needs, transition agency participation, preschool transition planning conference, consultation time and description of special class programs to county office, parental/adult student access to records and provision to amend student records.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit. The improvement plan submitted in June 2004 will be reviewed for final approval. Upon approval, no further action with regard to the plan will be required.