

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

**District:** Highland Park School District **County:** Middlesex

**Monitoring Dates:** June 4 and 5, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Georgianna Parlacoski, Deborah Masarsky and Stephen A. Coplin

***Background Information:***

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Highland Park School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Highland Park 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 Highland Park 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, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and 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 on May 2, 2002. 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, speech therapists, parents and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The district's "**Successful Students' Workshops for Parents**" program is organized by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Workshops are provided for parents regarding the district's special education programs/services.

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The district's "Teen Center" is a school-based program that offers a wide variety of proactive and preventative counseling services for middle and high school students. It also provides essential experiences and supports to help students achieve at their highest levels.

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

**General Provisions** and **Statewide Assessment** were determined to be areas of total 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 for occupational therapy/physical therapy/speech therapy, frequency/duration/location for related services, length of school day/year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding transfer students. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives for counseling.

**Areas of Need:**

**Goals and Objectives for Counseling** – During the on-site visit it was determined through staff interview and record review that goals and objectives are not developed for the related service of counseling.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that goals and objectives are developed and included in IEPs when counseling is required as a related service. The improvement plan must include an oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, consent, and independent evaluations.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding surrogate parents and native language. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified the 15-day timeline. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision and content of notices.

**Areas of Need:**

**Provision of Notices** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interview and review of files that notices are inconsistently provided.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notices are consistently provided and the provision is documented in the files. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Content of Notices** – During the on-site visit it was determined through review of district notices that they do not contain all required components. Missing components varied from notice to notice.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that district notices contain all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of vision/hearing screenings and 20-day timeline.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding direct referrals and health summaries. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified child find activities and pre-referral interventions as areas of need. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this element.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding identification meeting participants.

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**Areas of need:**

**Identification Meeting Participants** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and interviews that the entire child study team is not consistently present during identification meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure identification meetings include the participation of the three members of the child study team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**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 assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the components of functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address these areas of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding multidisciplinary evaluations, functional assessments and written reports for students eligible for speech/language services.

**Areas of Need:**

**Assessment Process** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews with speech therapists and file review indicated that although speech assessments are conducted, speech therapists do not develop speech evaluation reports.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure speech evaluation reports are developed subsequent to conducting assessments. The written reports must include the educational impact statement from the classroom teacher as well as the required components of the functional assessment. The improvement plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation timelines, participants and reevaluations completed by age 5.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding attempts made to gain consent for reevaluation. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring.

**Section VII: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meeting participants, eligibility criteria and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the eligibility statement for students classified as specific learning disabled. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of annual review participants and timelines, teacher access/responsibility and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding considerations/required statements. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified parental options to observe programs prior to placement. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures to bring about the required change. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include this element.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding 90-day timeline.

**Areas of need:**

**90-Day Timeline** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review that initial IEPs are not consistently implemented within 90 days from the date of consent.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that IEPs are implemented within 90 days from the date of consent. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of these procedures.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of participation of out-of-district students in nonacademic/extracurricular activities within the district.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern regarding the individualized decision-making process. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified consideration/documentation of supplemental aids/services, general education access and continuum of programs. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight components to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of courses of study and preferences/interests inventory.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding student invitations. The district had developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified the statement of transition service needs, needed transition services and agency involvement as areas of need. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**Areas of need:**

**Agency Invitations** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through staff interviews and record review that agencies that may be providing or paying for transition services are not consistently invited to transition meetings.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that agencies that may be providing or paying for transition services are consistently invited to transition meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Section X: Transition – Transition to Preschool**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding procedural safeguards. The district has developed an improvement plan that does not sufficiently address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section XIII: Graduation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of choice of diploma and notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercise/activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding IEP requirements. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses this area of need.

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

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**Areas of need:**

**Notice of Graduation** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through interviews with child study team members and record review that the district does not provide Written Notice of Graduation to parents and adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents and adult students are provided with Written Notice of Graduation and that this provision is documented in the file. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures. It is recommended that the district adopt the sample notice form developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of class and group sizes and age ranges.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding consultation time for general and special education teachers. The district has developed an improvement plan that sufficiently addresses these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit.

**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access to records and maintenance/destruction of records.

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

**Areas of Need:**

**Documentation of Other Locations of Student Records** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not document the location of other records in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records maintained by the district is documented in central files.**

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**Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Highland Park School District on June 4 and 5, 2002. 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, 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.

At a focus group meeting held on May 2, 2002, parents expressed concerns regarding the quality of education for severely disabled students, disclosure of all options to parents during IEP meetings, IEP implementation, provision of related services, transition services, teacher and parent training, full continuum of programs within the district and the need for communication between case managers and parents. In addition, parents submitted written documentation regarding concerns with the decision making process and the development of the IEP. Many of the concerns raised by the parents had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. One parent stated she was pleased with the programs and services her child receives.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, extended school year, provision of related services, goals and objectives for occupational therapy/physical therapy/speech therapy, frequency/duration/location for related services, length of day/year, facilities, certification, provision of meetings, consent, independent evaluations, vision/hearing screenings, 20-day timeline, multi-disciplinary assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation participants, reevaluation completed by age 5, eligibility meeting participants, eligibility criteria, copy of evaluation to parents, annual review participants and timelines, teacher access/responsibility, implementation dates, out-of-district students in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, transition courses, preference/interest inventory, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational setting, statewide assessment, choice of diploma, notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercises/activities, programs and services, access to records and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding transfer students, surrogate parents, 15-day timeline regarding written notice, notices in native language, child find activities, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, accept/rejection of reports, attempts made to gain consent for reevaluation, eligibility statement for students classified as specific learning disability, considerations and required statements in the IEP, parents' option to observe program prior to placement, individualized decision-making process, consideration/documentation for supplemental aides and services, general education access, continuum of program, statement of transition service needs, statement of needed transition services, agency

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involvement, student invitation for transition, procedural safeguards, graduation requirements in the IEP, consultation time between general and special education teachers and description of special education programs.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives for counseling, provision of notices and the content of all notices, identification meeting participants, assessment process for students eligible for speech/language services, 90-day timeline, agency invitation, written notice of graduation and documentation of other locations of records.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Highland Park School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan. In areas requiring the development of procedures, the improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation. In addition, any improvement plan activity that requires staff development must include a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service.