

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

District: Holland Township School District

County: Hunterdon

Monitoring Dates: December 9, 2004 and April 7, 2005

Monitoring Team: Kim Murray, Nicole Buten

Background Information:

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Holland 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 Holland Township 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 Holland 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 Holland Township School on December 9, 2004.

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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

Data Summary:

The Holland Township School District had a classification rate of 14.48% in 2004. This is below the state average for that year of 16.575%. As of December 1, 2004, 61.6% of students eligible for special education and related services or speech language services were placed in general education for more than 80% of the day which is significantly above the state average of 41.9%. An additional 37.4% of students with disabilities were placed in general education for between 40%-80% of the day.

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Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Eligibility, Transition, Statewide Assessment and 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 I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of staff training. The district identified statements of present levels of educational performance, information on IDEA, providing accommodations and modifications and collaboration between general education and special education teachers as areas in need of staff training. However, the improvement plan developed by the district only addresses staff training in relation to statements of present levels of educational performance. **The improvement plan submitted by the district must be revised to include all areas of need identified in the self-assessment.**

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

Area(s) of Need:

Parent Training: Through interviews with the director of special services it was determined that the district does not offer training on special education topics to parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure parent training on special education topics is provided to parents whose children attend the Holland Township School District.**

Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of extended school year, provision of programs, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

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 compliance in the areas of consent, content and provision of notification of a meeting, content and provision of notice of a meeting, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of a procedure for the selection and training of surrogate parents. The improvement plan developed by the district 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 compliance in the areas of Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of health summaries. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding pre-referral interventions.

Area(s) of Need:

Pre-Referral Interventions: Through staff interviews and document review it was determined that, while the district has an Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team, a large majority of the intervention plans developed by the I&RS team referred the students to the child study team without first attempting interventions in general education settings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that the I&RS team receives the training and support necessary to function effectively. The team should receive training regarding accommodations and modifications that can be utilized as interventions in the general education setting, the need to ensure parental participation when developing the intervention plan and developing a means to determine the effectiveness of intervention plans.**

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Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of standardized assessments, multidisciplinary assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, signed and dated written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students potentially eligible for speech language services, and acceptance or rejection of outside reports.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through document review that evaluations completed by child study team members do not include all of the necessary components of a functional assessment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluations conducted by the child study team include the components necessary to constitute a functional assessment. Implementation of these activities will ensure eligibility determinations are based on a variety of assessments. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of planning meeting participants and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding three year reevaluation timelines.

Area(s) of Need:

Three Year Reevaluation Timelines - During interviews with district staff it was determined that, due to a lack of child study team members, reevaluations are not completed every three years as mandated by New Jersey special education regulations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students with disabilities receive a multi-disciplinary reevaluation at least every three years. The improvement plan must**

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include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.

Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of IEP meeting participants, statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards and age of majority.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations and required statements, teacher access and responsibility and IEP implementation.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding annual review timelines, IEPs to parents and 90-day timelines for completion of initial evaluations.

Area(s) of Need:

Annual Review Timelines – Through staff interviews and document review it was determined that meetings to review and revise the IEPs of students with disabilities are not occurring at least annually as required by New Jersey special education regulations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that meetings to review and revise the IEPs of students with disabilities occur at least annually in accordance with New Jersey special education code. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the improvement plan activities.**

IEPs to Parents – While the district has a procedure for provision of IEPs to parents, document review indicated that this procedure is not implemented on a consistent basis. As a result, parents do not always receive copies of IEPs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that the procedure developed by the district regarding provision of IEPs to parents is implemented on a consistent basis. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the improvement plan activities.**

90-Day Timelines - Through staff interviews and document review it was determined that, due to lack of appropriate staff, initial evaluations are not completed within 90-days as mandated by New Jersey special education regulations.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that initial evaluations are completed, and initial IEPs are implemented, within 90-days of receiving parental consent. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the improvement plan activities.**

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Section IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of decision-making process for placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and continuum of placement options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment and consideration of supplementary aids and services. The improvement plan developed by the district is sufficient to address these areas of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notification and participation of students placed out of district in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

Area(s) of Need:

Notification/Participation in Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities - Through staff interviews it was determined that the district does not have a procedure to ensure that students receiving special education and related services at an out-of-district placement receive notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure students receiving special education and related services at an out-of-district placement receive notification of extracurricular and nonacademic activities in order to provide access to those activities. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the improvement plan activities.**

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

No findings could be made in this area as the district did not suspend any special education students during the 2003-2004 or 2004-2005 school years.

Section XIII: Graduation Requirements

As this 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 compliance in the areas of class sizes and age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy and home instruction.

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding hiring of sufficient staff and consultation time.

Area(s) of Need:

Sufficient Staff and Consultation Time – Through staff interviews it was determined that, while attempts to hire a child study team member were conducted during the 2004-2005 school year, the district was unable to retain a school psychologist for case management and testing purposes. As a result, evaluation timelines and consultation time with teachers were negatively impacted.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that child study team members are employed in sufficient numbers to fulfill testing and case management responsibilities. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the improvement plan activities.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Holland Township School District on December 9, 2004 and April 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 Holland Township School District had a classification rate of 14.48% in 2004. This is below the state average for that year of 16.575%. As of December 1, 2004, 61.6% of students eligible for special education and related services or speech language services were placed in general education for more than 80% of the day; a significant increase over the state average of 41.9%. An additional 37.4% of students with disabilities were placed in general education between 40%-80% of the day.

Approximately twenty parents attended the focus group meeting held on December 9, 2004. All of the parents praised the special education teachers in the district and attributed their children's success to their efforts. Those parents whose children participated in the in-class support programs were generally satisfied with the program but felt the teachers, both general education and special education would benefit from in-service training. A small number of parents were satisfied with the efforts of the child study team members and the Director of Special Services. The majority of parents expressed concerns about procedural issues such as scheduling meetings, receiving copies of IEPs and responses to written requests. Other concerns involved compliance issues such as provision of programs and related services as required by the IEP and provision of services by appropriately certified staff. Many parents stated that the Director of Special Services and Superintendent did not support special education in the district and were barriers to the growth of the district's special education program.

Eligibility, Transition, Statewide Assessment and Student Records were determined to be areas demonstrating compliance with all standards by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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, extended school year, provision of programs, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, content and provision of notification of a meeting, content and provision of notice of a meeting, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, direct referrals, vision and hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, standardized assessments, multidisciplinary assessments for student eligible for special education and related services, signed and dated written reports, bilingual evaluations, planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, IEP meeting participants, statements of present levels of education performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, decision-making process for placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE), class sizes and age ranges, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction and continuum of placement options.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, procedure for the selection and training of surrogate parents, health summaries, multi-disciplinary evaluations for students potentially eligible for speech language

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services, acceptance or rejection of outside reports, considerations and required statements, teacher access and responsibility, IEP implementation, documentation of consideration of placement in the least restrictive environment and consideration of supplementary aids and services.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding parent training, pre-referral interventions, functional assessments, three year reevaluation timelines, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, notification/participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, sufficient staff and consultation time.

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