

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

**District:** Holmdel School District

**County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Dates:** October 5, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Barbara J. Tucker and Debbie Masarsky

***Background Information:***

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Holmdel School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Holmdel 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 Holmdel 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 William R. Satz School, on October 5, 2004.

During the on-site visit, NJDOE monitors 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, speech/language specialists and child study team members.

**Data Summary:**

Although the Holmdel School District's classification rate has been substantially below state classification rates, data submitted by the district indicates that the classification rate for the district's 3-21 year-olds is on the rise from 8.2% in 2001 to 9.0% in 2003. Specifically, problems with the Intervention and Referral Service process at the middle and high schools may be contributing to the steady increase. The district will address these concerns through their improvement plan. Also, during the last three years the

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district has on average, surpassed the state placement average of preschoolers in self-contained preschool classes. The district identified this as an area of concern in their self-assessment, but will need to revise their improvement plan to ensure that all of the issues have been appropriately addressed.

Placement data submitted by the district for the past three years, indicate that for disabled students ages 6-21, the district has surpassed the state average both when it comes to placing students in the general educational setting for more than 80% of the day and between 40% and 60% of the day. Statewide placement rates for students in this category are around 41% for the 6-21 age groups, while the district averages 58% for this age group.

The district is commended for having a 0% drop-out rate and a 100% graduation rate during the last two school years. Data show that 100% of the graduates go on to post secondary education.

**Areas Demonstrating Compliance with All Standards: General Provisions and Statewide Assessment** was 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, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of in-service training for bus drivers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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

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

**Staff Development**-During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff that the district does not have an identified plan of professional development/training. **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that there is a cohesive plan of professional development that is clearly connected to the areas of need identified in the self-assessment. Additionally, the district will revise the improvement plan to include a mechanism to evaluate the implementation of the strategies or procedures discussed at the training.**

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### **Section II: Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of goals and objectives in IEP, length of school day/year, process for transfer students, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of related services at the beginning of the school year, adaptive physical education, checking for properly functioning hearing aides, parents paying for services and copy of procedural safeguards to parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Additionally, during the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and the provision of counseling as a related service throughout the school year. **The district did not submit an improvement plan to address these areas of need. The district must develop an improvement plan and include procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content/provision of notices of meetings and written notices. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notices in native language and participants at required meetings for students eligible for special education and related services.

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

**Notices in Native Language-** During the on-site visit, interviews and review of district documents indicated that for parents who speak a language other than English, the district does not provide notices in the parents' native language. Additionally, the district does not have a procedure in place for obtaining such documents in a timely manner.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that notices are provided in the parents' native language, when feasible. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are made aware of appointments, decisions, and plans relevant to their child's education. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Participants at Required Meetings**-While interviews confirmed that staff is aware of who should be attending meetings, record review conducted during the on-site visit indicated that frequently, general education and special education teachers are not in attendance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure all that required participants attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that information is obtained from all required participants and that parents have the opportunity to discuss the provision of special education programs and services within the general education environment with the individuals who will be part of the provision of those and/or services or who have knowledge of the general education environment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents or staff, child study team referrals, health summary/vision/ hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines and Intervention and Referral Service teams at the middle and high schools. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, provide staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written reports and explanation of written reports to parents. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks**

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**procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance/rejection of outside reports and summer evaluations.

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

**Acceptance/Rejection of Outside Reports**-During the on-site visit, interviews and record reviews indicated that the district does not document the acceptance or rejection of outside reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that reports written by personnel not employed by the district are accepted or rejected by the Holmdel School District child study team. The acceptance or rejection will be documented in the student file. Implementation of these activities will ensure that relevant and necessary information is considered for each student and becomes part of the report(s) of the district. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Summer Evaluations**-During the on-site visit, interviews with staff and record review indicated that the district does not employ child study team members or teachers during the summer months. As a result, evaluations and mandated meetings are not conducted to ensure compliance with all evaluation meeting timelines.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that evaluations and meetings are conducted during the summer to meet required timelines. The implementation of these activities will ensure that students are provided programs and services in a timely manner. The plan must also 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 area of planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of three-year timelines and reevaluation revisions. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding re-evaluations for students who may no longer require speech/language services.

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### Area(s) of Need:

**Re-evaluations for Speech/Language-** During the on-site visit, interviews and record reviews indicated that speech/language specialists do not conduct reevaluations prior to terminating speech/language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures and staff training to ensure that prior to terminating speech/language services, speech/language specialists will conduct a reevaluation to determine the student's continued eligibility.**

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

#### Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of eligibility criteria, statement of Severe Learning Discrepancy (SLD), signatures of agreement/disagreement-rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to meetings, timely receipt of outside reports and failure to use a formula to determine SLD. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 compliance in the areas of present levels of educational performance (PLEPs), age of majority, annual review timelines and 90-daytimelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of goals /objects/benchmarks, case mangers monitoring IEPs, IEP implementation, copy of IEP to parents, teacher access to IEPs, age of majority and teacher responsibility in implementing IEP. **The district did not submit an improvement plan to address these areas of need. The district must develop an improvement plan and include procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding consideration/required IEP statements.

### Area(s) of Need:

**Consideration/Required IEP Statements-**During the on-site visit, interviews and record reviews indicated that the district's IEP format does not contain the required statements/considerations.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that the district's IEP includes all of the required statements and considerations. It is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the New Jersey Department of Education Programs. The implementation of this activity will ensure that IEP team members will have the opportunity to document the decision-making process that led to the proposed programs and services.**

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

#### Summary of Findings:

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consideration of supplementary aids/services, regular education access, notification/participation of out-of-district students in non-academic/extracurricular district activities, continuum of programs for preschoolers and use of assistive technology. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, it needs to provide in-service training and develop an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the responses to the questions of least restrictive environment and access to general education programs.

#### Area(s) of Need:

**Documentation of the Consideration of Least Restrictive Environment-**During the on-site visit, interviews and record review indicated that the district's IEP does not consistently include responses to all four questions required when determining the least restrictive environment.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies: the consideration of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modifications; the explanation why the supplementary aids and services and program modifications are not appropriate; and the, documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. The implementation of this activity will ensure that the IEP team has documented the decision-making process and more clearly defined the rationale for a specific placement. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Access to Regular Education Programs-**During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with staff that the district has a policy, whereby, all students with disabilities who fail the High School Proficiency Assessment are required to be placed in an academic lab course, which teaches test strategies, while general education students who fail the same test, are placed in a basic skills program which re-teaches content areas.

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- **The district is directed ensure that decisions regarding placement in the program are made on an individual basis as part of the IEP process. The district must also ensure that students with disabilities are provided equal access to general education programs based upon the Core Curriculum Content Standards in a general education setting with their peers as determined by the IEP team. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the area of student preferences/interests survey/assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, student Invitation to meetings and student preparation for meetings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding student preferences/interests survey/assessment and agency invitation to meetings.

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

**Student Preferences/Interests**-During the on-site visit it was determined through interviews and review of records that student interests and preferences are not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that courses of study appropriately reflect the student's interests and preferences.**

**Agency Invitation to Meetings**-During the on-site visit it was determined through record review and interviews with staff that representatives of agencies such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) that would be likely to provide post-secondary transition services to students, are not invited to IEP meetings when transition services will be discussed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the agencies likely to provide post secondary transition services are invited to attend IEP meetings when transition services will be discussed.**



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### Section X: Transition to Preschool

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of three-year old students placed in program by third birthday and preschool transition planning conferences.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation of child study team members.

#### Area(s) of Need:

**Participation of Child Study Team Members at IEP Meetings**-During the on-site, interviews and record review indicated that, when a preschool age student is referred for an initial evaluation, only the speech/language therapist and one member of the child study team conduct the evaluations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures, and staff training to ensure that at a minimum, two members of the child study team and the speech/language specialists conduct evaluations for preschoolers. These activities will ensure that the preschool student is evaluated appropriately in all areas of the suspected disability. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### Section XI: Discipline

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings and 45-day return.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case managers, suspension tracking and provision of procedural safeguards. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

### *Section XIII: Graduation*

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of graduation requirements documented in IEPs.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of out-of-district student participation in graduation activities and provision of written notice of graduation to parent/adult student. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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 compliance in the areas of age range/waivers, speech/language group sizes and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time, insufficient staff, class sizes and description of special education programs to county office. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

**Class Sizes-** During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews with the directors and child study team members and class lists indicated that there are a number of classes at the high school which exceed the required code limit.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the number of students enrolled in in-class support classes does not exceed the maximum number allowed by regulation. This activity will ensure that the district can more effectively implement programs and services in an environment where the students will have the opportunity to derive the full educational benefit.**

### **Section XV: Student Records**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of parental access/requests and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets and documentation of other record locations. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, staff training and an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Holmdel School District on October 5, 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 having a 0% drop-out rate and a 100% graduation rate during the last two school years, and although its classification rate has been substantially below state classification averages, recent trends indicate a rise in the classification rate from 8.2% to 9.0% for its 3-21 year-old population. Furthermore, during the last three years the district has placed more preschoolers in self-contained preschool classes than the overall statewide average. However, the district is commended for surpassing the state average by more than 17% when it comes to placing students in the general education setting for more than 80% of the day.

General Provisions 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.

At the focus group meeting and in phone interviews with parents, some parents were generally positive and indicated satisfaction with some of the district's programs and services, however, many other parents expressed concerns about issues such as: the need for improved communication between parents and the district, the needs of out-of-district students, general education teachers who do not always seem to know how to implement modifications in IEPs, CST members who do not respond to parental requests in a timely manner and students who are in need of assistive technology, but who can not use it, either because teachers don't know how to, or refuse to, use it.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information to parent, goals and objectives in IEP, length of school day/year, process for transfer students, facilities and certification, consent, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process, documentation of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents or staff, child study team referrals, health summary/vision/ hearing screenings, identification meetings/timelines, I&RS teams at middle and high schools, multidisciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, planning meetings, Present Levels of Educational Performance, age of majority, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, three-year olds in program by third birthday, preschool transition planning conferences, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, 45-day return, graduation requirements documented in IEPs, age range/waivers, speech/language group sizes, home instruction, parental access/requests and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of in-service training for bus drivers, the provision of related services at the beginning of the school year, adaptive physical education, checking for properly functioning hearing aides, parents paying for services, copy of procedural safeguards to parents, extended school year, the provision of counseling as a related service throughout the school year, content/provision of notices of meetings, written notices, surrogate parent, written

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reports, explanation of written reports to parents, three year timelines, reevaluation revisions, eligibility criteria, statement of Severe Learning Discrepancy, signatures of agreement/disagreement-rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to meetings, timely receipt of outside reports, failure to use a formula to determine Severe Learning Discrepancy, documentation of goals /objects/benchmarks, case mangers monitoring of IEPs, IEP implementation, copy of IEP to parents, teacher access to IEPs, teacher responsibility in implementing IEP, consideration of supplementary aids/services, regular education access, LRE continuum for preschoolers, notification/participation of out-of-district students in non-academic/extracurricular district activities, use of assistive technology, the statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, student invitation to meetings, student preparation for meetings, documentation to case mangers, suspension tracking, provision of procedural safeguards, out-of-district student participation in graduation activities, provision of written notice of graduation to parent/adult student, consultation time, insufficient staff, description of special education programs to county office, access sheets and documentation of other record locations.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding staff training/in-service, notices in native language, participants at meetings for students eligible for special education and related services or at meetings for students eligible for speech/language services, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, summer evaluations, reevaluations for students being declassified for speech/language services, consideration/required IEP statements, documentation for LRE, access to regular education programs, student preferences/interests survey/ assessments, agency invitation to meetings and participation of child study team at preschool IEP meetings, members and class sizes.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Holmdel School District will resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas requiring the development or revision of procedures, the provision of in-service training and the development of administrative oversight components where needed.

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**New Jersey Department of Education  
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**Ms. Susan Howard-Board President  
Dr. Maureen Flaherty-Superintendent  
Interim Director of CST-Mr. Ron Rosenberg  
Interim Director of Special Services-Ms. Elizabeth Parnagian**