

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

**District:** Hopewell Valley Regional School District

**County:** Mercer

**Monitoring Dates:** September 22, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Deborah Masarsky and Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Hopewell Valley Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hopewell Valley Regional 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 Hopewell Valley Regional 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 Administration Building on September 09, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team conducted staff interviews and reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, timeline logs and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records.

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### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for its “Buddies” program in which regular education students act as buddies to special education students to facilitate instruction as well as to provide opportunities for recreational and socialization activities during extended school year programs.

The district is further commended for its “Partnership in Parent Training” program in which presenters in the area of special education are made available to parents in both Hopewell Valley Regional School District and Montgomery School District to expand the number of topics and experts on those topics.

The district is commended for addressing behavioral issues. By employing an in-house behavior therapist who assists in the development of behavior intervention plans, the provision of staff training and the implementation of behavioral techniques, the district avoided the need to suspend any students with disabilities for more than 10 days during the 2002-2003 school year.

### **Data Summary:**

The district’s data indicated an increase in the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in post-secondary education. Of all students with disabilities who graduated in June 2003, 78% have continued their education and 22% have secured employment as compared to June 2002 graduates with a rate of 64.5% who continued their education and 22.6% who secured employment.

The district is commended for increasing the number of students with disabilities who participate in general education. An in-district program for students with autism was established for the 2002-2003 school year. The creation of this program allowed four additional students with autism to be returned to the district. As a result, 75% of the students with autism are now receiving services within district and have access to their non-disabled peers. In addition, during the 2002-2003 school year 77% of the district’s preschool age students with disabilities were included in either full time or part time regular education programs.

The district has instituted a series of staff workshops for regular education teachers regarding differentiated instruction in an effort to increase the number of special education high school students who are included in general education programs. By providing this training the district has been able to expand the number of in-class support programs and inclusion classes at the high school.

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

**General Provisions, FAPE, LRE, Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements** 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.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notices and surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address 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 themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, convening of evaluation planning meetings with required participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, 20-day timelines to respond to a parental request, referral process/pre-referral interventions, health summaries and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address child find activities.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible speech/language services and acceptance/rejection of outside reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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**Section VII: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation timelines for students eligible for speech and language services, reevaluation planning meetings with required participants and reevaluation by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation timelines for students eligible for special education and related services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address this area.

No additional areas of need were 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 convening eligibility meetings with required participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of agreement/disagreement with eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address this area.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of convening IEP meetings with required participants, considerations and required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, the provision of IEPs to parents, annual review timelines for students eligible for special education/related services, 90-day timelines and teacher access/responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of annual review timelines for students eligible for speech/language services and provision of related services progress reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of provision of student/agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of post-secondary planning process, determination of student interests and preferences, availability of guidance activities regarding transition and the statements of "Transition Service Needs" and "Needed Transition Services." The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address 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 themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three.

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

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager and suspension tracking. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, class size and home instruction.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time between regular education and special education teachers, facilitation of entry of students residing in state facilities and instructional group size for special education programs at the high school. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has begun to implement its improvement plan to address consultation time and group size.

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 area of access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parental access to student records, amendments to student records and documentation of other locations of student records and maintenance and destruction of student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit it was determined that the district has implemented its improvement plan to correct the area of documentation of other locations of student records in the central file.

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 Hopewell Valley Regional School District on September 22, 2003. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process which as resulted in the correction of many of those identified areas prior to the on-site visit. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in post-secondary education or secure employment; that by employing an in-house behavior therapist, the provision of staff training and the implementation of behavioral techniques, the district avoided the need to suspend any students with disabilities for more than 10 days during the 2002-2003 school year; that the district has increased the number of students with disabilities who participate in general education at the preschool level and at the high school level.

Twenty-two parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services and communication between themselves and teachers and case managers. Some parents expressed concerns regarding provision of enough extra-curricular activities within district for out-of-district students, provision of occupational therapy progress reports, communication between parents and related services providers, teacher strategies for educating students with "more involved" disabilities, provision of transition services, training for regular education teachers, consultation time between regular education and special education teachers, written response to parental requests and behavioral, social and emotional issues of middle and high school students with disabilities. The majority of these issues had been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included parent/staff development, policies/procedures, dissemination of public information, extended school year, provision of programs/services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certification, consent, provision of notices, notices in native language, interpreters, independent evaluations, direct referrals, convening of evaluation planning meetings with required participants, functional assessments and multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for special education/related services, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, signed/dated reports, reevaluation timelines for students eligible for speech/language services, reevaluation planning meetings with required participants, reevaluation by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings with required participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabilities, provision of evaluation reports to parents, convening IEP meetings with required participants, considerations/required statements in IEPs, present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, provision of IEPs to parents,

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annual reviews for students eligible for special education and related services, 90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, decision-making process, consideration of supplementary/aids services, regular education access for in-district students, notification/participation to out-of-district students of non-academic/extracurricular activities within district, continuum of programs, student/agency invitations, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessments, accommodation/modification in statewide assessments, IEP documentation of statewide assessment, graduation requirements, out-of-district participation in graduation exercises/activities, written notice of graduation, age range, class size and access sheets.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding content of notices, surrogate parents, child find activities, 20-day times to respond to a parental request, referral process/pre-referral interventions, health/medical summaries, vision/hearing screenings, multidisciplinary evaluations and functional assessments for students eligible for speech/language services, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, reevaluation timelines for students eligible for special education/related services, agreement/disagreement with eligibility, annual review timelines for students eligible for speech/language services, provision of related services progress reports to parents, post secondary transition planning processes, determination of student interests/preferences, availability of guidance activities regarding post-secondary transition, statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, documentation to the case manager of suspensions, tracking of suspensions, consultation time between regular and special education teachers, facilitation of entry of students residing in state facilities, instructional group size at the high school, parental access to student records, amendments to student records, documentation of other locations of student records and maintenance/destruction of student records.

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