

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

**District:** Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District

**County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Dates:** November 18, 19, 20, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Deborah Masarsky, Stephen A. Coplin, Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Michelle Davis

### ***Background Information:***

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Matawan-Aberdeen 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 Matawan-Aberdeen 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 Matawan-Aberdeen 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 November 14, 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, speech therapists, general education and special education teachers, and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for its participation in the **Dare to Dream Program**. This program offers special education students the opportunity to participate at the Student Leadership Conference for New Jersey high school students. This transition program

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encourages students to attend State sponsored workshops and presentations in an effort to increase their knowledge and awareness regarding self-advocacy skills. Six district students delivered a presentation at the New Jersey State Dare to Dream Conference this past year.

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

**General Provisions, FAPE, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services 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 III: Procedural Safeguards***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, content/provision of notices for students eligible for special education and related services, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring regarding content and provision of notices for students eligible for speech/language services.

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

**Content and Provision of Notice for Students Eligible for Speech/Language Services** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that notices of a meeting do not contain the required components. Additionally, written notice following an identification meeting does not contain the required components. Furthermore, speech therapists do not provide written notice of eligibility.

- **The district will revise its notices to ensure they contain the required components. The plan must also include procedures to ensure written notice is provided to parent(s)/adult students when determinations of eligibility are made. It is suggested that the district adopt the model notices developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. The district's plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/administrators, health summaries, hearing/vision screenings and identification meeting participants.

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

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding direct referrals from teachers and 20-day timelines for convening identification meetings.

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

**Direct Referrals from Teachers** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews that although the district's referral procedures allow for direct referrals to the child study team by parents and administrators, teachers must refer students to PAC.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to ensure that staff have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in a meeting when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of these activities.

**20-Day Timelines** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that the district does not consistently meet the required 20-day timeline for convening identification meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district convenes identification meetings within twenty days of receipt of the written request for referral to the child study team. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant 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 evaluations, standardized assessments, signed/dated evaluation reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of outside reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of functional assessments. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, the monitors verified that the district has provided training to all child study team members regarding the functional assessments and that staff members have begun to implement these procedures.

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

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### **Section VI:   Reevaluation**

#### **Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting participants, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, the monitors verified that the district has provided training to all child study team members and speech/language specialists regarding reevaluation timelines and that these staff members have begun to implement this procedure.

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

### **Section VII:   Eligibility**

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

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the documentation of disagreement with eligibility, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and provision of evaluation reports to parent(s) for students eligible for speech/language services.

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

**Disagreement with Eligibility** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that although the district's eligibility form is used to document agreement with eligibility, the form does not contain a section for any participant(s) to state their opposing opinion.

- **The district will revise the form to ensure it contains a section in which participants can document their opposing opinion to eligibility determinations.**

**Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that for students determined eligible under the category specific learning disability, the district does not document the specific area(s) of severe discrepancy between the student's current achievement and intellectual ability and does not state that the student's disability is not primarily a result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, general cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

- **The district needs to revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when documenting the eligibility statement for specific learning disability, the district includes all the required components. The**

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**improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Provision of Eligibility Reports to Parents** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined that speech/language therapists do not consistently provide evaluation reports to parent(s) at least ten days prior to the eligibility meeting.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language therapists provide parent(s) with copies of evaluation reports at least ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance statements, annual goals/objectives related to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review/90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility and provision of IEPs to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of required participants at IEP meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, the monitors verified that the district has provided training to all child study team members and speech/language specialists regarding required participants at IEP meetings and that these staff members have begun to implement this procedure.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding IEP changes.

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

**IEP Changes** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district does not consistently convene IEP team meetings when considering changes to students' programs/placements. Parents are advised of changes in programs/placements via phone contact by the case manager and are provided with the "Review and Revision IEP" form developed by the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district convenes IEP team meetings with the required participants when considering changes to students' IEPs. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making process/continuum of programs for students ages 5-21, LRE documentation and regular education access.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding decision-making process/continuum for preschool disabled students and notification to out-of-district students of nonacademic/extracurricular activities within district.

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

**Decision-Making Process/Continuum for Preschool Disabled Students** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with the preschool child study team that the district considers placement of self-contained preschool disabled students into the district's four-year old nursery program for part of the day. However, the team does not consider placement of preschool disabled students into a regular nursery program with appropriate supports because of perceived financial barriers (ie: not enough students to warrant such a program). An interview with the director indicated that there are no financial barriers to the consideration for the placement of preschool disabled students into regular nursery classes.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the preschool team members are aware that there are no financial constraints to placements in general education preschool settings. The plan must further ensure these settings are considered for all preschool students and provided, with appropriate supports and services, when appropriate. The plan must also ensure the preschool team considers this type of placement for those students who are currently placed in the district's program and who may benefit from an inclusive setting the next school year. The district's plan must include staff training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Notification to Out-of-District Students of Nonacademic/Extracurricular Activities Within District** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with child study team members that the district does not consistently notify out-of-district students of nonacademic/extracurricular activities, excluding graduation activities, provided within the district. As a result, these students are not afforded the same opportunities to participate in these types of activities as students who are placed within the district.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides notification to students placed out-of-district regarding nonacademic/extracurricular activities that are offered within the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of written notification to the case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district further identified areas of need regarding determination of change in placement and provision of programs/services when appropriate. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks appropriate procedures, staff training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures. The district needs to revise the improvement plan to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students.

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

**Procedural Safeguard Rights for Potentially Disabled Students** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with child study team members and assistant principals that potentially disabled students are not afforded their procedural safeguard rights prior to removal from program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that potentially disabled students are provided their procedural safeguard rights prior to being suspended from school. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section XIII: Graduation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercises/activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation of graduation requirements (credit hours) when students are transitioning into high school. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, the monitors verified that the district has provided training to all child study team members regarding documentation of graduation requirements in IEPs and that these staff members have begun to implement this procedure.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding alternate requirements and the provision of written notice of graduation.

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**Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of Alternate Requirements** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with child study team members and record review that the district does not document the alternate requirement when a student is exempt from passing all or parts of the HSPA.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the alternate requirement in the graduation section of IEPs when students are exempt from passing all or parts of the HSPA. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

**Written Notice of Graduation** - During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with the high school child study members that written notice of graduation is not provided to parents/adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides written notice of graduation to parents/adult students. The district's plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District on November 18, 19, 20, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify most areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic changes. The district is further commended for implementing activities prior to the on-site visit that have resulted in the correction of some of these areas. 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs/services, student progress and the teaching staff. Two parents expressed a concern that speech and occupational therapy services do not begin in a timely manner at the beginning of the school year. During the on-site, a review of IEPs and therapy session schedules indicated services began in accordance with the dates identified in IEPs.

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/related services, documentation of frequency/location/duration of related services, goals/objectives for related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, content/provision of notices for students eligible for special education/related services, interpreters, independent evaluations, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents/administrators, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting participants, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, signed/dated evaluation reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, reevaluation planning meetings/participants, reevaluation by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility meetings/participants, criteria, documentation of agreement of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parent(s) for students eligible for special education/related services, considerations/required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance statements, annual goals/objectives related to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review/90-day timelines, teacher access/responsibility, provision of IEPs to parents, individualized decision-making process/continuum of programs for students ages 5-21, LRE documentation, regular education access, preschool transition planning conferences, IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three, preferences/interests, student/agency invitations to IEP meetings when transition will be discussed, statements of Transition Service Needs/Needed Transition Services, written notification to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, participation in statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessments, statewide assessment accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation of statewide assessments, notification to out-of-district students of graduation exercises/activities, class/group size, age range, home instruction, descriptions for special education programs, consultation time between regular and special education

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teachers, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of student records and documentation of other locations of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding child find, functional assessments, reevaluation timelines, required participants at IEP team meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, determination of change in placement, provision of programs/service when appropriate and documentation of graduation requirements (credit hours).

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding content of notices, provision of notice of eligibility, direct referrals from teachers, 20-day timelines, disagreement with eligibility, eligibility statement for specific learning disability, provision of eligibility reports to parents, IEP revisions, decision making process/continuum for preschool disabled students, notification to out-of-district students of non-academic/extra-curricular activities in district, procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, documentation of alternate requirements, provision of written notice of graduation, documentation of the alternate requirement when a student is exempt from passing all or parts of the HSPA.

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