

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

**District:** Medford Township School District      **County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** September 17, 18, 19, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Jane Marano, Arlene Popovici

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

During the 2001–2002 school year, the Medford 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 Medford Township 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 Medford 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 Memorial Middle School on September 10, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed district documents, including district policies and procedures, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students, teachers, related service personnel, and other relevant information, including a representative sample of student records. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district has made a commitment to maintaining a single grade configuration in the self-contained multiply disabled classrooms. This affords students the opportunity to more closely identify themselves with their regular education grade appropriate peer groups. In addition, the pupil to staff ratio in the multiply disabled programs is lower than

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

that required by code, allowing greater adaptations in delivery of instruction to accommodate special needs.

The district has established a partnership with a local community-based preschool program. Students placed in the district's preschool disabled program attend activities in the regular education preschool program on a weekly basis.

The district operates a half-day kindergarten program for all students. Kindergarten-aged students in the self-contained program spend the afternoon in this regular education program with in-class support services.

The district provides a web-based student information system called Power School. The system gives school administrators and teachers the ability to manage student records and give parents the ability to access and track their children's progress.

The district has received the "Exemplary Practice in Inclusive Education" award from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities for its inclusion programs.

The district is commended for its continued commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities and for its level of commitment to the support of inclusive programs. This is apparent from the highest levels in the administration to instructional and support staff. The district's child study team members are also commended for the level of documentation maintained in student files.

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

**Reevaluation, Least Restrictive Environment, Discipline, 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.

### ***Section I: General Provisions***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent and professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, transfer students, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP documentation of the frequency of related services and facilities. The county office has been made aware of the facilities issue.

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

**Related Services** – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records and related services schedules indicated that OT, speech, and counseling are provided for some students on a consultative basis. In these situations, IEPs do not identify the frequency of these services, stating only that they will be provided on an as needed basis. IEPs do not define the criteria under which the services will be provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district identifies the frequency and duration of related services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, provision of notice of a meeting, provision of written notice, interpreters, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of components of written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district further identified concerns regarding notice of a meeting (age 14 transition). The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding native language, and meeting participants.

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

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

**Native Language** – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the district does not provide notice of a meeting and written notice in the native language even when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of a meeting and written notice are provided in the native language, when feasible. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Meeting Participants** - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the district does not consistently have regular education teachers at preschool identification, eligibility and IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers consistently attend preschool identification, eligibility and IEP meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent 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 Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals from parents and staff, summer referrals, ID meetings timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 standardized assessments, signed written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, including documentation of educational impact provided by classroom teachers for students eligible for speech and language evaluations, and initial evaluations for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the in-service and an

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

administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services.

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

**Functional Assessments** – During the on-site visit, interviews with staff and a review of records indicated that speech evaluations do not include an observation of the student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district’s speech evaluations include an observation of the student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

### ***Section VII: Eligibility***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility criteria, statements of eligibility, signatures of agreement, disagreement rationale, and copies of evaluation report to parents 10 days prior to the meeting.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of goals and objectives linked to the core curriculum standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents and 90 day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP components, present levels of educational performance, teacher responsibility and knowledge of IEPs, and documentation of the decision-making process. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about corrections in the area of IEP components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice for 8<sup>th</sup> grade transition.

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

**Written Notice for 8<sup>th</sup> grade transition** – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and a review of records indicated that the district convenes an annual review meeting with a

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

representative from the receiving regional high school. Though an IEP is developed, written notice is not provided by the Medford School District. Instead, a final version of the IEP and written notice is mailed to the parents by the receiving regional high school district prior to the start of the next school year.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides written notice within 15 days of the IEP meeting. In the event the receiving school district disagrees with the program and services contained in the IEP, that district must reconvene the IEP team, develop a new IEP and provide written notice to the parents after July 1<sup>st</sup>. The plan must include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of student /agency invitation for students eligible for special education and related services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs including courses, preferences and interests and student invitations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient 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 implementation of programs by age three.

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 class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, consultation time, and home instruction.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of providing a description of special class programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 areas of access sheets, maintenance and destruction of files, and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent access. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Medford Township School District on September 17, 18, 19, 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 nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will bring about systemic change. The district is further 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.

Fifteen parents and fifteen staff attended the focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services, child study team services, and the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Parents and staff expressed concerns with communication issues between regular education and special education teachers, obtaining identical services when moving from a different state, budgets for hiring personnel and too much paperwork.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included all areas of reevaluation, least restrictive environment, discipline, statewide assessment, preschool transition and graduation. Other areas identified as consistently compliant included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day/year, transfer students, certification, surrogate parents, consent, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct parent and staff referrals, Identification meeting timelines, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement, disagreement rationale, copy of reports to parents 10 days prior to the meetings, goals and objectives linked to the core curriculum standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90 day timelines, individualized decision making, least restrictive environment documentation, considerations of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, out of district notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, post-school transition with student/ agency invitations, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, speech therapy group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, student records access sheets, maintenance and destruction of files and the documentation of locations of student files.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, extended school year, age 14 notice of meetings, written notice, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, IEP considerations and required statements, PLEP statements, teacher knowledge and responsibility for IEPs, age 14 agency transition service needs, courses of study and preferences and interests for transition, class descriptions and parent access to student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding related services, native language, notice of a meeting, written notice for 8<sup>th</sup> grade transition, identification meeting participants, functional assessments, eligibility, meeting participants, and IEP meeting participants.



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

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