

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

**District:** Monroe Township School District

**County:** Middlesex

**Monitoring Date:** October 20, 2003

**Monitor:** Deborah Masarsky

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Monroe 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 Monroe 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 Monroe 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 Brookside Elementary School on September 30, 2003. Information obtained from that meeting, from a comprehensive desk audit and parent interviews was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the monitor conducted classroom observations and staff interviews.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for their “**Social Skills Development**” program that is offered to students with disabilities who may require social skills development to interact appropriately with their peer group at school or at home. These students participate in weekly sessions where they are provided with opportunities to develop social awareness skills and use problem solving strategies in both controlled and unstructured social situations.

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The district is further commended for its “**Working with Children**” program. Three and four-year old children who live in the community, whether classified or non-classified, are provided with an opportunity to work with regular and special education high school students in a child care program three days per week. This program not only provides supervised instructional day care for preschool aged children, but also instills greater sensitivity, understanding and acceptance of challenged individuals by the high school students who work together as mentors.

The district is also commended for employing a behavioral therapist at the Barkley-Brook Elementary School who assists staff in the development of behavior intervention plans, the provision of staff training and the implementation of behavioral techniques. As a result of this individual’s efforts, this elementary school has been able to increase the number of students who are integrated with their non-disabled peers in regular education classes.

### **Data Summary:**

The Monroe Township School District data indicates a classification rate of 16.4% for the 2001-2002 school year, which is slightly above the state average of 16%. Although the district’s classification rate has decreased since the 1999-2000 school year, it has consistently remained above the New Jersey State average. In response to these data, the district indicated in the self-assessment the need to revise referral procedures, improve upon pre-referral interventions and be able to determine the effectiveness of the interventions in an effort to lower the district’s classification rate. The district’s improvement plan will be sufficient to address this concern.

During the 2001-2002 school year 52% of classified students were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. This is an 8% increase over the 2000-2001 school year and is above the 41.6% New Jersey State average. Even though the district is progressing in this area, their self-assessment indicated the need to increase resource programs and to re-train staff in an effort to further increase the percentage of their classified students’ involvement in regular education.

By providing staff training and hiring 7 additional *teachers of the handicapped* for the 2003-2004 school year, the district was able to reduce the number of students in self-contained classes by 28% and increase the number of students placed in *in-class support* programs by 13%. Additionally, for the 2003-2004 school year 14 classified students have been placed in fully inclusive programs. The district has developed a plan to ensure their progress is effectively monitored by their case managers.

Furthermore, the district’s data indicates that for the 2001-2002 school-year, 94.7% of their preschool disabled students have been placed in self-contained programs because the district does not provide a regular preschool program for its general education population. The self-assessment has indicated the need to develop relationships with community based preschools in an effort to provide appropriate integrated preschool programs for their preschool handicapped population. The district has addressed these concerns through their improvement plan and has placed two additional students in community programs for the 2003-2004 school year.

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**Section I: General Provisions**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies/procedures and dissemination of public information. The required Statement of Assurances and procedures have been submitted to the county office.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent training and staff development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. The district has begun to implement the improvement plan to correct these identified areas.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of provision of programs, documentation of frequency/duration/location and goals/objectives for related services, length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of counseling, availability of adaptive physical education, provision of related services, extended school year and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, content/provision of notices, notices in native language, surrogate parents and required participants at meetings. 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 IV: Location, Referral and Identification**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the child find activities, referral process, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timeline for convening of an evaluation planning meetings with required participants, health/medical summaries and vision/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 and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments, written reports 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.

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of the three-year timeline for reevaluation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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 area of the statement of eligibility for specific learning disability.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of required participants at eligibility conferences, eligibility criteria, agreement/disagreement with eligibility and the provision of evaluation reports to parents

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at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 age of majority and implementation dates.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation within the considerations/required statements, required participants at IEP meetings, 90-day/annual review timelines, provision of copies of IEP to parent(s)/adult student prior to implementation, teacher(s)/related service provider access/responsibilities for implementing IEPs, opportunity to observe proposed educational placement, completion of all components of present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, criteria and evaluation procedures for goals/objectives and progress reporting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of regular education access within district.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of decision-making process, consideration of supplementary aids/services, continuum of programs, integrated preschool programs, least restrictive environment documentation and notification/participation in extracurricular/nonacademic activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. The district has begun to implement improvement plan activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of post-secondary transition planning process, determination of student interests/preferences, the statements of "Transition Service Needs" and "Needed Transition Services," student/agency invitations and provision of transition services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### ***Section X: Transition to Preschool***

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences and IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### ***Section XI: Discipline***

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students and interim alternative educational settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### ***Section XIII: Statewide Assessment***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation and alternate proficiency assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of the use of the special review assessment (SRA) to demonstrate proficiency on the HSPA. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 themselves compliant in the area of and out-of-district participation in graduation activities.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of written notice of graduation and IEP documentation of graduation requirements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. A review of records and interviews determined that the district has begun to implement improvement plan activities to bring about correction in 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 consultation time between regular education and special education teachers, age range, class size, group size and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of adequate staffing, resource programs, supplementary instruction and descriptions of special education programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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, documentation of other location of student records and maintenance/destruction of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parental access to student records and content and amendments of student records. 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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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Monroe Township School District on October 20, 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 some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of the school day and that by employing a behavior therapist at the Barkley-Brook Elementary School, by providing staff training and by implementing behavioral techniques, that elementary school has increased the number of students who participate in general education. Additionally, as a result of staff training and hiring of additional special education teachers at all levels, the district has reduced the number of students in self-contained classes, increased the number of students in in-class support programs and increased the number of special education students who are fully included in regular education classes. Furthermore, by developing relationships with community preschools, the district has also increased the number of pre-school students with disabilities participating in general education programs.

Twenty-five parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Some parents expressed concerns regarding staff training, provision of invitations to students for IEP meetings, consideration/provision of post-secondary transition services, least restrictive environment discussions at IEP meetings, provision of evaluation reports prior to eligibility conferences and communication between themselves and staff. All of these issues were addressed 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 policies/procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of programs, inclusion of goals/objectives for related services in IEPs, length of school day/year, facilities, certifications, independent evaluations, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a student's last year in preschool, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, age of majority, IEP implementation dates, regular education access within district, statewide assessment participation, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessment, IEP documentation of statewide assessment, alternate proficiency assessment, out-of-district students participation in graduation activities within district, age range, class/group size, home instruction, consultation time for regular and special education teachers, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of student records, documentation of other location of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent training, staff development, provision of related services, extended school year, transfer students, parental consent, content/provision of notices, notices in native language, surrogate parents, required participants at meetings, child find activities, referral process, pre-referral interventions, 20-day timelines, summary of health/medical

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information, vision/hearing screenings, multidisciplinary evaluations for students eligible for speech/language services, functional assessments, written reports, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, 3-year timelines for reevaluation, eligibility criteria, agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations, provision of evaluation reports to parents at least 10 days prior to the eligibility conference, documentation within the consideration/required statements of the IEP, 90-day/annual review timelines, provision of copy of IEP to parent(s)/adult student prior to implementation, teacher/related service provider access/responsibilities for implementing IEPs, opportunity for parent(s)/adult students to observe proposed education placement, completion of all components of present levels of educational performance statements, goals/objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, criteria and evaluation procedures for goals/objectives, progress reporting, decision-making process in the least restrictive environment, consideration of supplementary aids/services, continuum of programs, integrated preschool programs, least restrictive environment documentation, notification to out-of district students of extracurricular/non-academic activities within district, post-secondary transition planning process, determination of student interests/preferences, post-school transition statements in IEP, student agency invitations, provision of transition services, preschool transition planning conferences, IEPs of preschoolers implemented by age three, documentation of suspensions to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, provision of procedural safeguard rights for potentially disabled students, interim alternative educational settings, special review assessment to demonstrate proficiency on the HSPA, provision of written notice of graduation, graduation requirements correctly documented in the IEP, adequate staffing, resource programs, supplementary instruction, descriptions of special education programs, parental access to student records and content/amendments of student records.

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