

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

**District:** Moorestown Township School District

**County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** April 1, 2, 5, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin and Ken Richards

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

During the 2002-2003 school year, the Moorestown 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 Moorestown 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 Moorestown 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 Moorestown Township Middle School on February 17, 2004. 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 employs a Special Education Advisory Team (SEAT), which is comprised of parents, school staff, and a representative of the Board of Education. The purpose of the committee is to advise the district regarding special education programs and services. The district also hosts a Special Education Parent Tea, in which opportunities

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are provided for parents and special education department members to meet informally and share information regarding state issues and district special education programs and services.

The district is involved with the Burlington County Inclusion Project, which facilitates the training of teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and parents to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes and programs. An inclusion coordinator is employed by the project and provides individual services to districts to train staff and assist in addressing specific needs of students or classroom staff in inclusive settings.

The district utilizes the Wilson Reading Instructional Program, as well as SRA Direct Reading Instruction and Cooper Learning Center Reading Services. The district also utilizes the Lindamood Bell Program, which stimulates phonemic awareness through a multi-sensory approach, and Fast ForWord Language, which is an interactive, computer-based program that builds the fundamental language skills critical for reading success and communicating in and out of the classroom.

The district employs the Multiple Options for Reading Enjoyment (MORE) Program, which is a four-week, three-hour per day summer program designed to improve reading skills for incoming kindergarten and first grade students. Students with disabilities are included in this program.

The district employs Douglass Outreach Services for Autistic Classes and Students, which provides consultative services to the autistic class at Baker Elementary School as well as to individual students located in other in-district school buildings.

### **Data Summary:**

During the 2002-2003 school year, 48.8% of the students eligible for special education and related services were placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day; this is above the state average of 41.6%. It should be noted that since the 2000-2001 school year, the Moorestown Township School District has increased the number of students placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the day by almost 10%. The data submitted by the district indicated that positive outcomes are increasing each year within trends, such as increases in the number of special education students placed in general education, of special education students graduating from high school, decreases in special education dropout rates, and increases in statewide assessment participation. Placement of preschool disabled students in general education settings is below the state average. 32.3%% of these students are placed in settings that offer access to general education. The district has addressed this area through their improvement plan.

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

**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 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 areas of professional and parent development. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the successful implementation of the activities.**

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 extended school year, related services (speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy), length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding provision of related services, goals and objectives for related services (counseling), duration of related services and oversight of IEP implementation.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Provision of Related Services/Goals and Objectives for Counseling** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that counseling is not consistently provided to those students who have that related service identified in the IEP. In addition, goals and objectives for counseling were not included in IEPs for students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that counseling is consistently provided for all students who have counseling identified in their IEPs. In addition, goals and objectives will be developed. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff are fully aware of the identified needs of the student and that the agreed upon services are provided to adequately address those needs.**

**Duration of Programs and Services** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district is identifying a range of time for programs and services to be provided (ex: 25-30 minutes) in student IEPs. This included programs such as pull-out resource center, in-class support, and all related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that duration of programs and services are specifically identified in IEPs for students. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff**

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are fully aware of the identified needs of the student and that the agreed upon duration of programs and services is provided to adequately address those needs.

**Oversight of IEP Implementation** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and parent interviews that general education teachers refuse to implement IEPs. Although the district offers some professional training, district staff have stated that general education teachers continue to refuse to implement accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. Further, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that at the elementary and high school levels, in-class support is provided as a pull-out resource center model, and although parents are aware of this change, IEPs were not changed to match the programs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include oversight activities to ensure that general education teachers implement the accommodations and modifications identified in the IEP. Additionally, the plan must include activities to conduct IEP meetings to determine the appropriate program for students where the IEPs do not match the programs being provided. Implementation of these activities will ensure each student receives the programs and services agreed to be the IEP team.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parent policy, consent, notices of meetings, and meetings.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice, native language, and independent evaluations.

#### **Areas of Need:**

**Written Notice** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that written notice is not provided for students who are eligible for speech and language services when it is determined that no additional assessments are necessary during the reevaluation process. Further, it was determined that written notice is not provided to parents within fifteen days of the IEP meeting for students eligible for special education and related services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is provided to parents whenever the district proposes to implement a change to a students program or services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are fully aware of the actions being proposed or denied by the district.**

**Native Language** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that written notice is not provided in parents' native language, even when feasible.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that written notice is sent to the parents in their native language, when feasible. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully aware of decisions that were made at a meeting.**

**Independent Evaluations** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that when the district denies a parental request for an independent evaluation, it does not request a due process hearing. Instead, the district responds to the parent in writing of their decision to deny the request.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a due process hearing is initiated within 20 days in the event it chooses to deny a request for an independent evaluation. Implementation of these activities will ensure the denial is made by an administrative law judge, as required by N.J.A.C.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct referrals for parents and staff, summer referrals, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of vision and hearing screenings, pre-referral interventions and overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns in the area of health summary and nature and scope. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these issues because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure that the school nurse compiles this information. The plan must be revised to include this component.** The district also identified concerns regarding the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The district will continue to receive technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office for Civil Rights regarding improvement plan activities.

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

### ***Section V: Evaluation***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, and overrepresentation of minority students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

### ***Section VI: Reevaluation***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings, notices, participants at planning meetings, parental consent, and turning age five reevaluations.

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

#### **Area of Need:**

**Reevaluations for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that students are declassified from speech and language services without a reevaluation. Instead, a letter is sent to the parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a reevaluation is conducted prior to changing a student's eligibility status. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and have the opportunity to request due process in the event they disagree with the decision made by the district.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. 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 participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, and 90-day timelines.

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

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 areas of Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, accommodations and modifications, regular education access, and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of individualized decision-making and continuum. The district identified a need to decrease the number of preschool disabled students and school-aged students in out-of-district placements. The barriers to compliance are teacher availability, scheduling difficulties, and lack of resource program options at the high school. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conference and early intervention programs to preschool disabled by age three.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, and age 16 needed transition services.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding courses of study.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Courses of Study** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that although courses of study are usually documented for 9<sup>th</sup>

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and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, courses of study are not consistently documented in student IEPs for eleventh and twelfth grades.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that projected courses of study are considered and included for all students ages fourteen and older. Implementation of these activities will ensure students are afforded the opportunity to participate in coursework that will allow them to achieve their post-secondary outcomes.**

### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of suspension tracking.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, 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 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, and home instruction approvals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area schedules, specifically child study team responsibilities, citing high caseloads as a barrier to compliance. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding common planning time for teachers.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Common Planning Time** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and schedule reviews that teachers at all levels are not given time to plan with other teachers regarding students for whom they share educational responsibilities.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that teachers at all levels are given common planning time with teachers who share educational responsibilities for specific students. Implementation of these



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activities will ensure student needs are discussed and activities and strategies developed to address those needs within the general education setting.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance of records, and destruction of records.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other records.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Locations of Other Records** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that central files do not document where other records for a student may be found.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that central files document where other records maintained by the district are located. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and adult students are aware of all records maintained by the district.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Moorestown Township School District on April 1, 2, 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 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.

A review of data indicated the district has increased the number of students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of the school day. The district continues to strive for positive student outcomes for students with disabilities in the areas of access to general education, graduation and participation in statewide assessment. The district indicated a need to increase the percentage of preschool students who have access to a general education setting, as well as students who are placed in out-of-district settings. The district also has indicated a need to offer more resource center options. The district has developed a plan to address these needs through their improvement plan.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with the autistic program and parent training. Concerns were raised regarding teacher knowledge of IEPs, staff development, scheduling of meetings, scheduling of classes, Child Study Team caseloads and child find. Parents reported that general education teachers have refused to implement student IEPs.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Statewide Assessment and Graduation Requirements.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, meetings, child find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, notices, participants at reevaluation planning meetings, parental consent, turning age five, eligibility meetings and participants, documentation of eligibility, IEP participants, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, Oberti, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention programs to preschool disabled programs by age three, student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, suspension tracking, class size waivers, age range waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional and parent development, pre-referral interventions, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, functional assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, overrepresentation of minority students, eligibility criteria, provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to eligibility meetings, individualized decision-making, continuum, discipline procedures, documentation of removals to case manager, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, interim alternative educational settings, disciplinary rights afforded to potentially disabled students, and schedules.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding provision of and goals and objectives for counseling, oversight of IEP implementation, written notice, native language, independent evaluations, reevaluations for students eligible for speech and language services, courses of study, common planning time, and documentation of locations of other records.

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