

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

**District:** Morris Hills Regional School District

**County:** Morris

**Monitoring Dates:** May 5 and 6, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Gladys Miller

***Background Information:***

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Morris Hills School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Morris Hills School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Morris Hills 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 Morris Hills High School, on April 25, 2005. 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 is commended for implementing and expanding the Flex 1 and Flex 2 programs. The Flex 1 program provides after school support and transportation for students who need help with study skills and homework. The Flex 2 program is based in the Resource Center and allows students with emotional and behavioral disabilities to attend school under a flexible schedule. There is a low staff to student ratio and

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

intensive support to assist students in achieving work towards meeting course proficiencies. This program and the expansion of other programs have contributed to a 25% reduction in the percentage of students educated out of district.

### **Data Summary:**

The Morris Hills Regional School District reports a classification rate of 14.8%, which is below the state average. The district has also reported a 13.5% improvement over the last three years in the overall percentage of students with disabilities educated in the least restrictive setting. Over the same period of time, there has been a 25% reduction in the percentage of students with disabilities educated out of district. Additionally, the district reported the number of students with disabilities dropping out of school declined from 7.47% to 4%, representing a 46% reduction.

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

**Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation Requirements and Programs and Services** 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 areas of staff and parent training. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in these 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 extended school year, provision of programs, provision of programs and related services of counseling, occupational and physical therapy including goals and objectives, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of speech, provision of home instruction and provision of in-class support. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in the areas of provision of speech and provision of home instruction.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notices, meeting interpreters and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent to release student records, notice of meetings, Identification meeting timeline and native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral process, child find and identification timelines (addressed in Section III). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in 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 multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of acceptance and rejection of outside reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement or disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 compliance in the areas of IEP meetings, ninety day timelines, implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines and IEPs to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of shared time participants, teacher responsibility, present levels of educational performance and review of annual goals and objectives. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in 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 areas of least restrictive environment documentation, consideration of supplementary aids and services and general education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participation in extra curricular activities and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern.

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

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

### **Section X: Transition to Adult Life**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, age 16 transition service needs and preferences and interests assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student invitation, partnerships with community resources and career guidance for out of district students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional 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 protection of potentially disabled students, notification to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans and interim alternative education settings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in 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, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of consent to release student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has successfully implemented activities to bring about correction in 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 Morris Hills Regional District on May 5 and 6, 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 an exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the implementation of corrective action to address the majority of areas of need identified during the self assessment process prior to the on-site visit. The district is further commended for the many areas identified as compliant by the district during self assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

A review of data indicated the district has maintained a classification rate of students requiring special education below the state average. There has been an increase from 38.5% to 43.7% over the last three years of students with disabilities educated in the general education setting for more than 80% of the day. Additionally, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities educated in a separate setting during the same period of time from 15% to 11.2%. Furthermore, the number of students with disabilities dropping out of school declined from 7.47 % to 4%.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. However, many parents also expressed a concern that some teachers do not implement accommodations and modifications in general education classes as per their children's IEPs. The district has developed an improvement plan to address teacher knowledge of the IEP and responsibility for implementation. Additionally, the district has developed an improvement plan to address both the general education and special education staff development.

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, length of day and year, extended school year, provision of related services, transfer students, facilities, certification, surrogate parents, consent, written notices, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluation, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, ID meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, written reports signed and dated, bilingual evaluations, nature and scope of evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meeting participants, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, least restrictive environment documentation, supplementary aids and services, general education access, age fourteen transition service needs, preferences and interests assessment, age sixteen transition service needs, statewide assessment participation, accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate proficiency assessment, graduation requirements, out of district participation, written notice of graduation, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, consultation time, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff development, home instruction, provision of speech, provision of ICS, short term objectives, meeting notices, notices in native language, consent to release student records, documentation of referral date, child find, pre-referral interventions, identification meeting timelines, acceptance and rejection, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior, shared time participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives, teacher access and responsibility, least restrictive environment decision making process, nonacademic and extracurricular activities, continuum, student invitation, community resources, out of district career guidance, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting and consent to release student records.

The on-site visit identified no additional areas of need within the various standards. As a result, the improvement plan submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs for approval. Verification of the implementation of the remaining activities in the improvement plan will be conducted by the County Office of Education.