

New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

District: North Brunswick Township School District **County:** Middlesex

Monitoring Dates: April 29, 30, 2003

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Background Information:

During the 2001-2002 school year, the North Brunswick 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 North Brunswick 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 North Brunswick 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 North Brunswick Township School District on April 10, 2003. 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 utilizing the services of students in the **Honor Society Tutoring Program** to provide tutoring for any student who needs extra assistance with academics. In addition, the district hires additional instructional staff and aides to work with the students in this supportive environment after school hours.

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The district offers **The Family Circle/Project Harmony** to promote character education. A group of students, headed by a teacher, form a family to assist each other in building character skills and promoting tolerance.

In addition, the district provides **Buddy Ball Soccer**, a challenging program which allows students and their parents to participate in a form of recreation. The district encourages students and parents to compete in Buddy Ball Soccer with other communities in order to foster good relations.

Areas Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:

Statewide Assessment was determined to be an area 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/procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of in-service training for staff and parents. 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 correction in this area.

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, related services goals and objectives, length of school day/year, transfer students and certification of staff.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding facilities. The county office has been advised of the concerns regarding the facilities at the Parsons Elementary School.

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Section III: Procedural Safeguards

Summary of Findings:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of surrogate parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area. Additionally, the district identified concerns regarding delaying the action for which parental consent was obtained and provision of written notice within 20-days of a parental request. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notices in native language, provision of notice of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services and content of notices for students eligible for speech language services

Area(s) of Need:

Notices in Native Language - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not provide notices in the parent's native language, when feasible.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure notices are provided in the native language of the parent when feasible. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Notice of Eligibility - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not provide notice of eligibility to parents and adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that parents and adult students are provided with notice of eligibility. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Content of Notice for Students Eligible for Speech Language Services- During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that district notices for students eligible for speech language services do not contain the required components.

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- **The district will revise its notices for students eligible for speech language services to ensure they include all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the notices developed by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.**

Section IV: Location, Referral and Identification

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find, direct referrals from parents and staff, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and participants at identification meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-referral interventions and the referral 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 correction in these areas. Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding convening identification meetings within the 20-day timeline. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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 multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, signed and dated reports, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments.

Area(s) of Need:

Functional Assessments - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services do not include documentation of interventions attempted. Additionally, functional assessments for students eligible for speech language services do not include interviews with the parent and the referring teacher, the developmental history or interventions attempted.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all initial evaluations conducted by child study team members and speech language therapists contain the required components of a functional assessment in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4(d). The improvement plan must also include in-service training and an**

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administrative oversight component to ensure the implementation of the procedures.

Section VI: Reevaluation

Summary of Finding:

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and the need for a reevaluation when considering a change in eligibility or when requested by a parent/teacher. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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 meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and signatures of agreement/disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of evaluation reports to parents 10-days prior to an eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area/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 present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines and teacher access to IEPs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of changes to students' IEPs without convening meetings, meeting participants, 90-day timeline, IEPs in effect prior to the provision of services and implementation of IEPs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to

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include these elements. Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding obtaining input from secondary level staff at annual reviews for fifth graders. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.** The plan must be revised to include this component.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding age of majority and IEPs to parents.

Area(s) of Need:

Age of Majority - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not consistently inform parents and students that all rights will transfer to the student at the age of majority.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents and students are informed that all rights will transfer when the student reaches the age of majority. It is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.**

Provision of IEPs to Parents - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review, staff interviews and telephone calls to parents that the district inconsistently provides parents with copies of IEPs prior to implementation of the student's program.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs are provided to parents prior to implementation of the student's program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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/decision-making process, regular education access and continuum of programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of supplementary aids and services and notification to students in out-of-district programs regarding nonacademic and extracurricular activities. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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

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Section X: Transition to Post-School

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of statement of transition service needs, assessing students' preferences/interests, statement of needed transition services and student/agency invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of developing partnerships with community agencies. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. Additionally, the district identified a concern regarding developing transition plans for non-college bound students. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

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 area of preschool transition planning meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. Additionally, the district identified concerns in the area of early intervention to a preschool disabilities program by age three. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan must be revised to include these elements.

Section XI: Discipline

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings-list and 45-day return.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, procedural safeguards for the potentially disabled and evaluation of students subjected to disciplinary measures in an expedited manner. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

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Section XIII: Graduation

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of choice of diploma and out-of-district students' participation in graduation activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding written notice of graduation.

Area(s) of Need:

Written Notice of Graduation - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not provide written notice of graduation to parents and adult students.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure parents and adult students receive written notice of graduation. The improvement plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XIV: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range, group sizes for speech therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time for teachers, an apportioned amount of time for case management duties and insufficient staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. Additionally, the district identified a concern in the area of class sizes for resource center programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes.** The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the use of classroom aides

Area(s) of Need:

Use of Classroom Para-professionals/Aides – During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews, telephone calls to parents, classroom visits, record review and information gathered at the district's focus group meeting that paraprofessionals who are assigned to classes that exceed class size limits are being

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removed and reassigned by building administrators when one-to-one aides or other classroom aides are absent and substitute coverage cannot be arranged.

- **The district must immediately cease the practice of removing classroom aides from their primary assignments. Additionally, the district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that substitute coverage for these individuals is provided in an appropriate manner. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section XV: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student record access requests, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of records.

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

Area(s) of Need:

Documentation of the Location of Other Records- During the on-site monitoring, it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other records maintained by the district in the central file.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the location of other records is identified in the central file.**

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Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the North Brunswick Township School District on April 29, 30, 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. The district is further commended for the many areas determined to be compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations. The district is also commended for the implementation of activities that has resulted in the correction of some areas identified during the self-assessment process.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, approximately twenty-five parents attended the evening meeting. Several reported that they feel the district provides a high quality of education. Parents expressed concerns regarding the district's inability to provide preschool information and extra-curricular information to out-of-district students. They indicated that there is poor communication between child study team members and teachers and that programs are not individualized. Additionally, parents reported that in-class support programs are not offered at all levels or for college-prep classes. At the high school level, it was reported that transition services are not discussed with students until the eleventh grade. It was mentioned, as well, that teachers and child study team members are told by administrators not to recommend "high priced services." Many parents voiced concern about the use of classroom aides to provide home instruction, as well as reassigning classroom aides to provide coverage when another aide is not present in school. Finally, some parents indicated that since teachers do not have access to students' IEPs they are not familiar with the content of these IEPs. Many of the concerns voiced by the parents had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process.

A standard identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site visit included Statewide Assessment.

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, provision of programs, related services, goals and objective for related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, certifications, consent, content of notice for students eligible for special education services, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, child find, direct referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, participants at identification meetings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, signed and dated reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, signatures of agreement/disagreement, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, teacher access to IEPs, least restrictive environment/decision-making process, regular education access, continuum of programs options in district, statement of transition service needs, assessment of student preferences/interests, student/agency invitation, statement of needed transition services, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings-list, 45-day return, IEP requirements for graduation, age range, group sizes for speech therapy,

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home instruction, student record access requests, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding in-service training for staff and parents, surrogate parents, delaying the action for which parental consent was obtained and provision of written notice within 20-days of a parental request, pre-referral interventions, referral process, 20-day timelines/identification meetings, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation when considering a change in eligibility or when requested by a parent/teacher, provision of evaluation reports to parents 10-days prior to and eligibility meeting, changes to IEPs prior to convening meetings, IEP meeting participants, 90-day timelines, IEPs not in effect prior to the provision of services and implementation of IEPs, obtaining input from secondary level staff at annual reviews for fifth graders, supplementary aids/services, notification/participation in extracurricular/non-academic activities for out-of-district students, developing partnerships with community agencies, transition planning for non-college bound students, preschool transition planning conferences, early intervention to preschool, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, manifestation determinations, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, evaluation of student subjected to disciplinary measures in an expedited manner, choice of diploma, out-of-district students participation in graduation activities, resource center class sizes, consultation time for teachers, apportioned amount of time for case management and insufficient staff (child study team members and teachers).

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding facilities, notices in native language, notice of eligibility, content of notice for students eligible for speech language services, functional assessments for students eligible for special education/related services and students eligible for speech/language services, age of majority, IEPs to parents, written notice of graduation, use of classroom aides and documentation of the location of other records.

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