

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

**District:** Oxford Township School District

**County:** Warren

**Monitoring Dates:** November 12 and 13, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Zola Mills, Gladys Miller, Jennifer DeSaye, Jenifer Spear and Susan Wilson

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Oxford 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 Vernon 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 Oxford 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 Oxford School on October 23, 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 the school-wide enrichment program from Rutgers University, entitled MARE (Marine Aquatic Resources Education). The program teaches all students at each grade level different phases of the ocean's ecosystem.

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The district is also commended for the STAR-W grant for technology which will provide third through fifth grade level students two mobile laptop carts with thirty wireless laptops, reading and writing software, summer teacher training, after school tutoring and a part time in-class support technology and language arts trainer.

Additionally, the ACE+ technology grant will provide training for students, teachers and the community in a new technology center during school and after school hours. This grant will provide a language arts software program including achievement level testing for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. The technology will particularly benefit special education students as their programs can be tailored to their strengths and to their specific areas of need.

The district is further commended for such programs as Project ALERT, Red Ribbon Week and overnight trips to facilitate improved socialization and peer interaction for all students.

### **Data Summary:**

The district is commended for its successful efforts in placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Based on a review of district data, it was identified that of the nearly 60 classified students in the district, approximately 70.7% of them are educated with their non-disabled peers more than 80% of the school day. This exceeds the state average of 41.6%. Only 3.4% of the special education students are educated in out-of-district settings as compared to the state average of 9.1%. In the preschool age range, 80% of the students are placed out-of-district due to space limitations as compared to the state average of 53.2%. The new school construction is nearing completion and the administration plans to provide an appropriate program in the district for these pre-school and out-of-district students. The district's total classification rate is 13.2% as compared to the state rate of 14.1%

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

**Discipline and Statewide Assessment** 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 professional and parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of related services, length of day and year, and certifications.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

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

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site monitoring visit, parent interviews, staff interviews and record review indicated that with the exception of out-of-district students and preschool students, the need for extended school year services was either not discussed or the decision was delayed until spring with no mechanism to ensure an IEP meeting was conducted to consider this issue. As a result, some students who require an extended school year program do not receive it.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities and staff training to ensure that the district considers extended school year for all students and provides this service when appropriate. When it is determined this program is not warranted, the IEP must include the factor(s) that were considered. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents and staff are knowledgeable about the criteria for the provision of extended year services and that that criteria is consistently applied to all students.**

### **Section III. Procedural Safeguards**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of content and provision of notices of meetings, consent, content and provision of written notice, meetings, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech screenings and surrogate parents.

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

**Surrogate Parents** - During the on-site monitoring, interviews indicated that the district does not have procedures to locate and train surrogate parents should a student's parent not be available to participate in and provide consent for a special education process.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures for identifying and training a surrogate parent in the event one is needed. Implementation of this procedure will ensure the protection of rights of students in the educational decision-making process when the parent(s) is unavailable.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals and meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the referral process and identification meeting timelines. **The improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because implementation of the oversight component does not commence until December 2004. The district needs to identify reasonable timelines for implementation of oversight activities. These timelines will depend upon the nature of the areas of need. As such, some areas of need may be able to be corrected immediately, thereby requiring the immediate implementation of an oversight component.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screenings** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through record review and staff interviews that vision and hearing screenings and health summaries are not provided for students referred to the child study team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the school nurse summarizes all available health or medical information and conducts vision and hearing screenings for every student referred to the child study team for evaluation. The implementation of these activities will ensure the team has this information prior to the evaluation planning meeting to assist them in identifying suspected areas of disabilities and to assist them in determining assessments needed to make appropriate eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**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 and standardized assessments.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of functional assessment, signed and dated written reports, training and review for new speech language therapists and having at least one evaluator knowledgeable in the area of the suspected disability. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding bilingual evaluations and speech and language screenings.

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

**Bilingual Evaluations** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews that there are no procedures for conducting evaluations in other than English. Though this was not an issue in the past, recently, the district has had a number of non-English speaking families move into the district. As such, there are no activities in place to ensure these students are appropriately evaluated should the need arise.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that students are evaluated in their native language when appropriate. Implementation of these activities will ensure evaluation results are based on identified weaknesses and not on the student's inability to understand the language of the assessments.**

**Speech and Language Screenings** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record reviews indicated that the district is using speech screenings to determine the individual need for a full speech evaluation.

- **The district will immediately cease conducting individual speech screenings to determine the need for a speech evaluation. Additionally, the district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the speech therapist(s) conducts individualized evaluations only after a referral is made, and identification meeting is conducted and an evaluation is determined warranted and consented to by the parent. Implementation of these activities will ensure students are evaluated in all areas of suspected disability and that parents are fully informed of the actions the district is proposing. The improvement plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the appropriate implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, planning meetings and turning age five.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participants at planning meetings.

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

**Planning Meeting Participants** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that general and special education teachers were not consistently participating in planning meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities that will ensure the participation of both general and special education teachers at reevaluation planning meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required participants have the opportunity to provide information regarding educational services, adaptations and modifications in general education and special education settings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### ***Section VII. Eligibility***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation of eligibility and signature of agreement or disagreement with eligibility determinations, meeting participants and timelines

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meeting and insufficient child study team staff. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area need was identified during the on-site visit regarding criteria for specific learning disability (SLD).

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

**Criteria for SLD** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and review of evaluation reports that there is inconsistent or inappropriate application of the code criteria for eligibility for SLD. For example, a review of records indicated a team made determinations that students were SLD even though there was no indication of a discrepancy either in a comparison of standardized assessments or in a comparison of functional assessments and standardized assessment results. In another instance, a team identified a student as SLD by comparing verbal and performance scores on the WISC instead of comparing those scores to the student's academic performance on either functional or standardized assessments.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a severe discrepancy formula is applied appropriately to determine whether a student is eligible under the criteria of SLD. Implementation of these activities will ensure only those students who demonstrate a severe discrepancy are classified under SLD. The plan must include in-service**

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training for child study team members as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these activities..

### **Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, considerations and required statements, age of majority, provision of the IEP to parents and teacher access and knowledge.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of writing goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, present level of educational performance, implementation dates and annual review timelines. The district's plan is sufficient to address the annual review timelines. **The district's plan is insufficient to address the areas of staff training to write goals and objectives and present levels of educational performance statements because timelines are unreasonable. Since most annual reviews are completed in the spring, staff training needs to be completed prior to the commencement of the annual review process.**

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of notification and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum for preschool students and regular education access. **The plan is insufficient because it lacks specific activities to bring students back into the district such as the establishment of specific new programs, expansion of existing programs or plans to establish links with community-based preschool programs. The district will revise its plan to include these activities.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding individualized decision-making and the use of supplementary aids and services and the continuum for school aged students.

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

**Supplementary Aids and Services/Continuum** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and review of IEPs that in answering the four Oberti questions the district does not consider a general education placement with supplementary aids and services first. As a result, supplementary aids and services are not being considered and students are placed in self-contained programs when a less restrictive environment may be appropriate if supplementary aids and services were provided. Some IEPs indicated "NA" in the section for consideration of supplementary aids and services. Additionally, during the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined

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through staff interviews, parent interviews and a review of records for special education students who receive in-class support for Language Arts and Math that they cannot receive this program for science or social studies because it is not offered. Only one student receives in-class support in these two subjects and it was indicated that in-class was provided only because the student has cerebral palsy and it addressed a safety issue.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure a full continuum of services is considered for all students and that supplementary aids and services in general education settings are considered and provided for each student where appropriate. Implementation of these activities will ensure every student has the opportunity to be educated with their nondisabled peers and receives appropriate supports and services to afford them the opportunity to derive educational benefit in the least restrictive environment.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency involvement and age sixteen needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invitations, preferences and interests and community and career exploration. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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

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

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding pre-school transition planning conferences and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three.

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

**Pre-school Transition Planning Conference** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and a review of records that school staff were not participating in the pre-school transition planning conference.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a child study team member participates in the early intervention transition planning conference. The implementation of these activities will ensure the continuity of needed programs and services when students age out of their EIP settings.**



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**Placement in Program by Age Three** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews and a review of records that students turning three in the late spring or during the summer were not evaluated until September due to the lack of summer child study team services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that child study team members are available as needed during the summer months to conduct mandated services. Implementation of these activities will ensure students are provided with their special education programs and services in a timely manner.**

**Section XIII: Graduation Requirements** are not applicable in this Pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> district

### **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 and home instruction.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding consultation time.

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

**Consultation Time** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through staff interviews that there is little opportunity for general and special education staff to consult and plan together. Special education teachers indicated they arranged for consultation time either before or after school or at lunchtime. A few teachers indicated they had some common planning time with one general education teacher but not with each general education teacher with whom they taught.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure there is sufficient consultation and planning time for general and special education teachers who are providing in-class support. Implementation of these activities will ensure teachers have the opportunity to discuss individual student needs and to appropriately plan for the joint provision of instructional services.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access and requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

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During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern with the organization of the child study team files. The district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 Oxford Township School District on November 12 and 13, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify 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.

The district is commended for educating a significant number of students with disabilities at the elementary level for more than 80% of the day in general education settings. Additionally, at the conclusion of its building program the district will create a preschool program that will serve to increase general education opportunities for preschool students and other out-of-district students.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, the four parents who attended the meeting expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the district's responsiveness to the needs of their children. One parent expressed concern that the same paraprofessional was not assigned each year for her child.

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, related services, length of day and year, certifications, notices of meetings, written notices, meetings, native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting participants, consent, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, independent evaluations, acceptance or rejection of outside reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, statement of eligibility, agreement or disagreement and rationale, IEP meeting and participants, considerations and required statements, age of majority, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, provision of IEP to parents, teacher access and responsibility, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, age fourteen transition service needs, agency involvement, procedural safeguards, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group sizes for speech, home instruction, access to student records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need including professional and parent development, facilities, referral process, identification meeting timelines, functional assessments, written reports, provision of at least one evaluator knowledgeable in the area of suspected disability, timely provision of evaluation reports to parents, insufficient child study team staff, training for new speech therapist, present levels of educational performance, writing of goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, regular

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education access for preschool students and out of district students, continuum, student and agency invitation, preferences and interests, career exploration opportunities and organization of student files.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, surrogate parents, health summary, hearing and vision screening, speech and language screenings, bilingual evaluations, planning meeting participants, criteria, continuum, individual decision-making, considerations of supplementary aids and services, pre-school transition planning conference, placement in program by age three and consultation time.

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