

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

**District:** Long Hill Township School District                      **County:** Morris

**Monitoring Dates:** September 15-19, 2003

**Monitoring Team:** Tracey Pettiford-Bugg and Jenifer Tucci

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Long Hill 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 Long Hill Township 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 Long Hill 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 Millington School on September 11, 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:**

Kids-In-Transition (KIT) is a program designed for preschool disabled students in need of applied behavioral analysis (ABA). This program runs the entire day and students are pulled out of SKIP, the pre-school disabled class, for this service. Additionally, some students that qualify for this related service benefit from additional ABA training by

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attending either the morning or afternoon session of the SKIP program and then attending the ABA program for the other half of the day.

Long Hill Township is especially involved with the development of the socialization of their students. The Sibling Support Group meets monthly and is designed for brothers and sisters of students with special needs. "No More Bullies" is a program that includes the students, aides, teachers, and administrators in developing plans to make their schools safe for everyone. This program provides all participants with the tools needed to be more respectful to others and to address problems in the classroom and playground. The Friendship Lunch Bunch meets one day per week for six to eight weeks during lunch. Groups consist of similarly aged students with special needs and non-disabled students. The facilitator works on social skills through various games and activities.

### **Data Summary:**

One hundred percent of students with special needs participate in the third and eighth grade statewide assessments. During the 2002-2003 school year, 7.1% of students with special needs who participated in the GEPA test scored advanced proficient in the language arts section. Additionally, during that same year, 21.4% of students with disabilities who participated in the GEPA test scored advanced proficient in the science section.

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

**Evaluation, Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records** 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 staff and parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

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

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site 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 frequency, duration and location for related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

An 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 it was determined through interviews and record review that the district has an elementary summer enrichment program that is used as its extended school year program. However, the services provided in this program are not based on the individual needs of students as determined by the IEP team. Instead, all students receive whatever services are provided. As a result, students may not receive services that are required to address issues related to recession/recoupment.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district provides an extended school year program that addresses the individual needs of students as determined by the IEP team. Implementation of these activities will result in students receiving the services required to better address regression issues. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, written notices, native language 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.

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 child find, health summary, vision and hearing screenings and identification meetings timelines and participants.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding pre-referral interventions and direct referrals.

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

**Pre-referral Process/Direct Referrals** – During the on-site monitoring, staff and parent interviews indicated that the district does not have an I&RS team to determine appropriate interventions in general education settings to students who are experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. In addition, these students are not referred to the CST when these difficulties warrant such an action. Rather, students are seen by a CST member who provides suggestions to the general education teacher. As a result, the student is not tracked to determine whether interventions were provided nor are the effects of these interventions monitored and documented.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to develop an I&RST to ensure interventions in the general education setting are provided and monitored when students experience academic and/or behavioral difficulties. These activities must also include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral to the CST. The implementation of these activities will ensure that staff and parents have the opportunity to refer a student to the I&RST or to the child study team in an effort to address the student's identified needs. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meeting and participants and reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of reevaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 and statement of eligibility for specific learning disability (SLD).

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement and disagreement with eligibility determinations after the eligibility meeting and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

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### Area(s) of Need:

**Signatures of agreement or disagreement** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated the district does not document assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services. As a result, a parent may not be aware of dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the district documents assenting and dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any disagreement with eligibility determinations. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents** – During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that copies of evaluation reports are not being provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meetings. As a result, parents may not be prepared to discuss eligibility issues at the eligibility conference or to have other individuals in attendance at the meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. Implementation of these activities will result in parents having the opportunity to be better prepared to discuss issues related to eligibility as well as have the opportunity to invite other individuals to the meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of annual review IEPs to parents and ninety day timelines. **The district did not submit a plan to address the area of the provision of annual review IEPs to parents. The district will develop activities to ensure parents receive a copy of the annual review prior to implementation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address ninety-day timelines because it lacks activities to ensure mandated timelines are met. The plan must be revised to include these activities as well as an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding individualized accommodations and modifications, annual reviews and reevaluations conducted during the last three months of the school year.

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

**Considerations and Required Statements/Accommodations and Modifications -** During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that student accommodations and modifications are not individualized. Instead, every IEP contains identical accommodations and modifications no matter the individual needs of the student.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that accommodations and modifications are based on the individual needs of the students. Implementation of these activities will ensure each accommodation and/or modification is identified and provided to address the needs of the student and to allow the student to more effectively demonstrate the acquisition of specific educational skills.**

**Annual Reviews/Reevaluations –** During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that nearly all annual reviews are conducted during the last three months of the school year. Though the IEP includes the program that will be implemented in September, it does not include a program that will be implemented from the date of the annual review to the end of the school year. As a result, these students do not have a valid IEP in place for the remaining months of the school year. Additionally, when reevaluations are conducted during the last three months of the school year, IEPs do not include the program and services the student will receive to the end of the current school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that annual review IEPs and reevaluation IEPs include the program and services the students will receive through the end of the school year as well as the program and services for the coming school year. Implementation of these activities will ensure each student has a valid IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of regular education access in district and nonacademic and extracurricular participation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of considerations of supplementary aids and services, documentation of the least restrictive environment decision-making process and lack of collaboration with community based preschool settings. **The district's plan is insufficient to address the area of considerations of supplementary aids and services and the documentation of the**

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**least restrictive environment statements because the plan does not include activities to ensure that these aids and services are considered and then documented in the IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.** The district's improvement plan for continuum of programs for preschool is sufficient to address this area.

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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Long Hill Township on September 15-19, 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.

A review of data indicated 100 percent of the students with disabilities participate in the third and eighth grade statewide assessments. Additionally, nearly 28 percent of these students scored advanced proficient in the areas of language arts (7.1%) or science (21.4%)

At a focus group meeting held prior to the on-site monitoring visit and through parent interviews, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the districts programs and services. However, of particular concern is the high turnover rate within the child study team over the last six years. Some parents indicated that their children have had a different case manager every year from kindergarten to seventh grade. Parents felt that this lack of consistency has had a negative impact on the planning for the provision of appropriate services since new case managers lack knowledge of the students they are servicing. Also, parents feel that considerable administrative barriers prevent the students from receiving the services they need when more significant needs are evidenced. Parents indicated that if they believe their children are in need of a particular service, they have to go directly to the superintendent. In addition, parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the referral process, citing that it takes several years for students identified by teachers to be evaluated and even then services are not always available. Many parents pointed out that once their child had a medical diagnosis rather than an education disability, their needs were addressed more rapidly.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, frequency duration and location for related services, length of day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, written notices, native language, independent evaluations, child find, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, identification meetings timelines, participants, planning meetings and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluation, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, IEP meetings, participants, PLEPS, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, teacher access and responsibility, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, preschool transition planning conference and transition from early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, age fourteen transition needs, preferences and interests, discipline documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior analysis, behavior intervention plan, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational setting, procedural



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safeguards, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, IEP requirements at age fourteen, class size and waivers, age range and waivers, group size, home instruction, consultation time, access and request for records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other location.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, surrogate parents, reevaluation timelines, annual review of IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, considerations of supplementary aids and services, LRE documentation and continuum for preschool.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, pre-referral process, direct referrals, agreement and disagreement rationale, copies of evaluation reports to parents, individualized accommodations and modifications, annual reviews of IEPs and implementation dates for reevaluations.

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