

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

**District:** Pennsville Township School District **County:** Salem

**Monitoring Dates:** May 20, 22 and 23, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair and Kenneth Richards

***Background Information:***

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Pennsville Township School District conducted a self-assessment of special education policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Pennsville 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 Pennsville Township School District developed an improvement plan to address their 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 district administration building, on May 16, 2002. 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 and vice principals, general education and special education teachers, child study team members, and parents.

***District Strengths:***

The district publishes a "Teacher and Parent's Guide to Special Education" that gives detailed information on child study team procedures and eligibility criteria for services. The guide also provides staff and parents with checklists for developing IEPs and

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transition plans. District personnel and parents report that this guide has enhanced the collaborative planning process.

The district operates the "Power School Program" which allows parents to electronically access information regarding student performance. In addition, parents and teachers are able to communicate through e-mail. This use of technology was initiated at the high school during the 2000-2001 school year and was expanded this year to include the middle and elementary schools. This program has enhanced parent and teacher communication.

The district coordinates a "School-to-Careers" program that originated as part of a federal grant. Students in the program attend classes at the high school as well as at the local community college. They also have the opportunity to work in the community in a variety of job settings including nursing homes, banks and other local corporations.

The district has developed its own standardized assessment program for students in grades 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. This assessment was designed to mirror the statewide assessments at grades 4 (ESPA) and 8 (GEPA) and coordinates with appropriate grade-level expectations in the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). The program was designed to better prepare students for the statewide assessments as well as to increase teacher accountability.

The district operates a "Young Consumers" program, in conjunction with a local supermarket chain. This program originated at Penn Beach Elementary School and is scheduled to expand to the middle school next year. The program teaches consumer skills, budgeting, and problem-solving skills through application to real-life situations.

The Pennsville Township School District is commended for its commitment to establishing and maintaining programs that address the individual needs of students with disabilities. During the on-site visit, it was observed that this commitment extends from the highest level of district administration to instructional and support staff.

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

**Discipline, Graduation** and **Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit. As a result of the implementation of activities prior to the on-site monitoring, all areas of **Transition** have now been corrected.

### ***Section I: General Provisions***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of special education policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent training and staff development. Although the district's improvement plan did not identify

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a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of staff development efforts, on-site monitoring indicated that the district has a successful mechanism in place. Therefore, the district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

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 length of school day/year, oversight of IEP implementation, facilities, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year and transfer procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. The district further identified concerns regarding the provision of related services. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address this issue because the plan lacks a procedure to determine if and/or when missed services will be made up. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, written notice timelines, and the provision of independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent and undue delay for initial evaluations, notice of a meeting, written notice of IEPs, and native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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

**Notice of Eligibility** – During the on-site visit, a review of student records indicated that the district provides written notice through the use of an eligibility conference report. If the student is found eligible for services, this report is provided with the IEP, as written notice. If the student is not eligible, this report is provided as a stand-alone written notice of eligibility. This document, when provided as a stand-alone notice, does not include the following components: options considered and rejected and the reasons they were rejected, a descriptions of the factors issued in making the determination, other relevant factors, and the short procedural safeguards statement.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice of eligibility includes all the required components. It is recommended the district adopt the notice forms developed by the 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, summer referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings for school-aged students, and identification meeting timelines and participants.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding vision/hearing screenings for preschool referrals.

**Areas of Need:**

**Vision/Hearing Screenings for Preschool Students** – During the on-site visit, a review of student records and interviews with district personnel indicate that for students referred through sources other than Early Intervention, vision and hearing screening information is not available for review at the time of the identification meeting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that vision/hearing screenings are conducted for all preschool initial referrals and that this information is available at the time of the identification meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**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 assessments, use of standardized assessments, acceptance and rejection of reports, and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of functional assessments for child study team evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding written reports and components of functional assessments for speech.

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### Areas of Need:

**Written Reports** – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records and interviews with district personnel indicate that child study team members and speech and language specialists are not dating their assessment reports.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure evaluation reports are dated. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**Functional Assessments for Speech** – During the on-site monitoring, a review of student records indicates that speech and language evaluations do not consistently include the following required components of a functional assessment: teacher interviews, student observations in other than a testing setting, documentation of the educational impact of the speech problem from the classroom teacher, a review of the student's developmental/educational history, and a review of interventions documented by the classroom teacher.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech and language evaluations include all the required components of a functional assessment. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures.**

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of reevaluation timelines and reevaluation for students turning age five.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for reevaluations, written reports for speech reevaluations, and reevaluation planning meetings.

#### Areas of Need:

**Functional Assessments for Reevaluations** – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with district personnel indicated that reevaluations do not consistently include an observation of the student in other than a testing setting.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations include an observation of the student in other than a testing setting. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures.**

**Written Reports for Speech Reevaluations** – During the on-site visit, a review of records and interviews with staff indicate that although assessments are conducted as

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part of the reevaluation of students eligible for speech-language services, a written report of the assessment results is not developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written reports are prepared for reevaluations of students eligible for speech-language services. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of procedures.**

**Reevaluation Planning Meetings** – During the on-site visit, record review and interviews revealed that at the annual review meeting for those students who will require a reevaluation during the following school year, the district conducts a reevaluation planning meeting, reviews data, and, if necessary, obtains consent to conduct assessments. However, those assessments are not conducted until the following school year. Because there is a significant gap between the review of data and the date of implementation of the decisions made as a result of that review, the information is no longer current. As such, decisions made at the time of the review may no longer be valid.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that at the reevaluation planning meeting, the district conducts a review of existing data and makes decisions based on that are implemented without undue delay. The plan must also include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of eligibility meetings, documentation of eligibility for students eligible for special education and related services, eligibility criteria, and provision of child study team evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified an area of need regarding the components of notice of eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue.

No additional area of need was 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 IEP goals and objectives, IEP implementation dates, and teacher knowledge/access to IEPs.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, IEP components, age of majority, provision of a copy of the IEP to parents prior to implementation, and 90-day evaluation timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented procedures that have brought about correction in the area of the provision of a copy of the IEP, prior to implementation.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding frequency and duration of resource services and provision of in-class support services.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Frequency, Location, and Duration of Services** – During the on-site visit, a review of IEPs indicated that the description of special education services does not identify the frequency and duration for resource center and self-contained classes.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs identify the frequency and duration for resource and self-contained instruction. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures.**

**In-Class Support (ICS) Services** – During the on-site visit, classroom observations, staff interviews, and a review of IEPs indicated that many students receive in-class support services. However, the IEPs for these students contain a statement indicating that either a “resource center teacher or instructional aide will be present in the ICS class each time the class meets.” A review of student schedules confirms that, in some instances, an instructional aide rather than a special education teacher is present in the class. Interviews indicated that this happens due to scheduling difficulties.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a teacher of the handicapped provides in-class support services. In the event the IEP team determines services can be effectively provided by an aide, the IEP must reflect that. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 continuum of services and access to general education programs.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding individualized decision-making, documentation of the *Oberti* considerations, and a lack of participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues. During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district has implemented activities that have brought about correction in the area of participation in non-academic and extra-curricular activities.

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No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

### ***Section XII: Statewide Assessment***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation in statewide assessments, provisions of accommodations and modifications, and IEP documentation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child study team (CST) knowledge of assessment content. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. The district also identified concerns regarding alternate assessments and participation in the SRA process. The district's improvement plan is not sufficient to address these issues because it lacks an appropriate procedure for alternate assessments and an unreasonable timeline for the SRA process. The plan needs to be revised to include an appropriate procedure and a reasonable timeline.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

### ***Section XIV: Programs and Services***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class-size for resource support programs and consultation time for resource teachers. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.



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### Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Pennsville Township School District on May 20, 22 and 23, 2002. 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 this, the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt correction of a number of areas that had been identified during the self-assessment process. Additionally, the district is commended for the many areas that were determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

A focus group meeting was held at the district's administration building prior to the monitoring visit. Although only one parent attended, this parent and district personnel, in attendance, expressed satisfaction with many of the district's programs.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, length of the school day/year, facilities, certification, independent and bilingual evaluations, Child Find and the referral process, assessments, reevaluation timelines, eligibility, provision of evaluation reports to parents, IEP goals and objectives, teacher knowledge and access to IEPs, continuum of programs and services, discipline, transition to preschool, graduation, participation in statewide assessment and provision of appropriate accommodations and modifications, class descriptions, age-ranges, homebound instruction, procedures for maintenance and destruction of student records, and documentation of the location of other student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff and parent development, extended school year, transfer procedures, related services, procedures for surrogate parents, consent, notice of a meeting, native language, functional assessments, meeting participants, 90-day evaluation timelines, age of majority, individualized decision-making, documentation of the *Oberti* considerations, SRA process, child study team knowledge of statewide assessments, and class-size.

During the self-assessment process, the district also identified concerns with providing a copy of the IEP to parents prior to implementation, student participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities, and school-to-post school transition. These areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards, regarding written notice of eligibility, vision/hearing screenings for preschool students, written reports, reevaluation planning meetings, frequency and duration of resource services, and provision of in-class support services.

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