

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

**District:** Plumsted Township School District

**County:** Ocean

**Monitoring Dates:** October 5, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Julia Harmelin and Patricia Fair

***Background Information:***

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Plumsted 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 Plumsted 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 Plumsted 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 New Egypt Middle School, on October 5, 2004. 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 director of special services, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district hosts a special education advisory council, as well as prepares a special education parent handbook, which is given to every parent of students with disabilities in the district.

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The district generates a number of individualized handbooks for staff in the district. The district generates a handbook entitled The General Education Teachers' Guide to Special Services in Plumsted Township, which is provided to every general education teacher in the district. The district has also generated a paraeducator manual, which is provided to each paraprofessional in the district. One paraprofessional was sent to the National Paraprofessional Conference last year. The district also generates a positive behavior intervention manual, which was collated by the Director of Special Services and the district behaviorist. The district also generates a Plan Book for Team Teachers, which allows teachers to research and provide unit lessons on the internet. In addition, IR & S training was provided across the district and collated into a handbook, as well as the district policies and procedures.

The district has a program called Check and Connect, a mentoring program for at-risk students, in which a teacher is assigned to each student and monitors the program. This program is coordinated by the high school social worker.

The district also provides a wireless laptop IEP model, in which IEP team members can write and view the IEP on a laptop at the IEP meeting and generate a truly collaborative IEP.

### **Data Summary:**

The district's data indicated a decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities since 2002. Of students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of the school day, there has been an increase since 2002, from 19.4% to 63.4%. The district's data also indicated that the percentage of students with disabilities who are in special education less than 40% of the school day and those who are separate settings has decreased dramatically over the past three years.

The district has instituted a number of staff workshops for general education and special education teachers, resulting in an increased number of students with disabilities placed in inclusive settings.

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

**Evaluation, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of dissemination of IDEA information.

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

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

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of adaptive physical education and transfer students. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in these areas.

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 consent, notices of meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, written notice for students eligible for special education and related services, interpreters at meetings, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parents. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas of notices of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services, written notice for students eligible for speech and language services, revisions to evaluation plans, and notices in native language.

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

##### **Notice of a Meeting for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services—**

During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that notice of a meeting is not consistently provided to parents.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of a meeting is consistently provided to parents and contains all of the necessary components, such as purpose, time, location, and participants. Implementation of these activities will result in parent knowledge and awareness of the purpose, time, location, and participants of the meeting. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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**Written Notice for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that written notice is provided for the IEP meeting but not for the evaluation planning meeting or the eligibility meeting for students referred for/eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice is provided to parents following all meetings, including the evaluation planning meeting and the eligibility meeting. Implementation of these activities will result in parent knowledge and awareness of the decisions that were made at the meeting. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Revisions to Evaluation Plans**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that evaluation plans do not consistently match the evaluations conducted after the meeting. Occasionally, an occupational therapy evaluation or a speech and language evaluation were deemed necessary by the child study team after the initial evaluation planning meeting; however, written notice to the parent was not consistently provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluations conducted match the evaluation plan, including any evaluations deemed necessary after the initial evaluation planning meeting. Implementation of these activities will result in parent knowledge and awareness of all evaluations being conducted with their consent. The plan must include in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Notices in Native Language**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that although notice of a meeting is provided in the native language of a parent, written notice is not consistently provided in the native language.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that notice of a meeting and written notice are consistently provided to the parent in the native language. Implementation of these activities will result in parent knowledge and awareness of the purpose, location, time, and participants of the meeting in their native language. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of the referral process, prereferral interventions, direct referrals for parents and staff, and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of child find ages 3-21. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings for students eligible for special education and related services and date of referral for students referred for speech and language services.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Health Summary/Vision and Hearing Screenings**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that the evaluation plan for students referred for special education and related services does not allow for a health summary or the results of a vision and hearing screening, therefore resulting in non-compliance.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a health summary and results of a recent vision and hearing screening will be completed for every student referred to the child study team for an evaluation. Implementation of these activities will result in the necessary information to identify suspected areas of disability and the appropriate assessments needed to make an eligibility determination. The district's evaluation plan must be revised to include a statement regarding a health summary and results of the vision and hearing screening. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Date of Referral for Students Referred for Speech and Language Services**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that the date of referral for a student referred for speech and language services is not clearly documented in the student's record, therefore causing difficulty in determining compliance with twenty-day timelines.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the date of referral is clearly documented in a student's record for those referred for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will result in compliant timelines to respond to a referral. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meeting participants and timelines, statement of eligibility, and signatures of agreement and disagreement.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria and copies of evaluation reports ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. Although the district initially identified these areas as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding eligibility conference reports for students eligible for speech and language services.

### **Area of Need:**

**Eligibility Conference Reports for Students Eligible for Speech and Language Services**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that there are no eligibility conference reports for students eligible for speech and language services. An IEP is completed for the student without the eligibility report.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech therapists complete an eligibility conference report for students eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will result in parent knowledge and awareness of eligibility determinations and all decisions made related to a student's eligibility. The plan must include procedures, in-service training, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training, and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Present Levels of Performance (PLEPs) and vocational personnel. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of decision-making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and general education access.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notification and participation of students in out-of-district settings in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

### **Area of Need:**

**Notification and Participation of Students in Out-Of-District Settings in Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that students placed in out-of-district settings are not consistently invited to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students placed in out-of-district settings are invited to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. Implementation of these activities will result in the invitation and possible participation of students in separate settings in extracurricular and nonacademic activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services and student and agency invitation.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of early intervention program to preschool disabled by age three.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of preschool planning transition conference. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks procedures to ensure consistent implementation. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

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

### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determination meetings, interim alternative educational settings, and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case managers and behavior intervention plans. Although the district initially identified these areas as areas of need, the district was able to demonstrate that it has already begun to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

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

#### **Area of Need:**

**Documentation of Locations of Other Records**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that student cumulative files do not document where other records for that student may be found.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that students' cumulative files document where other records for that student may be found. Implementation of these activities will result in the compliant documentation of student records. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**



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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Plumsted Township School District on October 5, 2004. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the district's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the district's improvement plan. The district is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify nearly all 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 that through staff workshops and district handbooks and training, the district has decreased their overall percentage of students with disabilities, as well as the number of students placed in separate settings and those placed in general education less than 40% of the school day.

Evaluation, Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents reported that they had a positive experience transitioning from early intervention programs to the district. Concerns were raised regarding lack of knowledge of the IEP and accommodations and modifications not consistently provided.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified through desk audits, the parent focus group meeting, and interviews include dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, provision of programs and services, provision of related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, written notice for students eligible for special education and related services, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, referral process, prereferral interventions, direct referrals for parents and staff, identification meeting participants and timelines, eligibility meeting and participants, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meeting participants, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, LRE documentation, consideration of supplemental aids and services, general education access, age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, age 16 needed transition services, student and agency invitation, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessments, manifestation determinations, Interim Alternative Educational Settings, procedural safeguards for discipline, access requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, staff development, adaptive physical education, transfer students, surrogate parents, child find ages 3-21, eligibility criteria, copies of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting, Present Levels of Performance, Vocational Personnel, continuum of programs, preschool transition

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planning conference, community experiences and leisure activities, documentation to case manager, and behavior intervention plans.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding notices of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services, written notice for students eligible for speech and language services, revisions to evaluation plans, notices in native language, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for students eligible for special education and related services, date of referral for students referred for speech and language services, eligibility conference reports for students eligible for speech and language services, notification and participation of students in out-of-district settings in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, and documentation of locations of other records.

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