

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

**District:** Princeton Regional School District      **County:** Mercer

**Monitoring Dates:** April 28, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Vanessa Leonard, Kim Murray, Nicole Buten

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Princeton Regional School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Princeton Regional 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 **Princeton Regional 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 Community Park School on February 11, 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 administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district is commended for initiating its "**Jump Start**" program. **Jump Start** is a week long summer session that prepares fourth graders moving on to fifth grade. This program serves as a transitional program that prepares students for the changes that

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occur in curriculum, routine and assists them in preparing for the different expectations that faculty members may have. The program also serves as a period for faculty to observe students, determining who may need help adjusting to the fifth grade program.

The district is further commended for the newly created **AVID program (Achievement via Individual Determination)**. **AVID** was created as an outreach program targeting underachieving middle school students, to assist in the prevention of these students from being unnecessarily referred to special education.

The district takes pride in the **IDEAS Center** at the High School which provides peer tutoring for all students. Many classified students use the **IDEAS Center** to receive assistance in their mainstream classes. The program is comprised of students from Princeton High School, Princeton University and volunteer community members.

The district also joined the **Minority Student Achievement Network**, which is a national coalition of 21 multiracial, urban-suburban school districts across the United States. The Network's mission is to discover, develop and implement the means to ensure academic achievement for students of color, specifically African American and Latino students. Several special education students participate in this program.

### **Part One Data Summary:**

The Princeton Regional School District data indicate that in 2002-2003, 35.1% of classified students between the ages of 6-21 were placed in general education settings for 80% of the school day, compared to the state average of 41.6%. Additionally, when compared to the state average, the Princeton Regional School District places 6% more of its students in out-of-district placements. The district addressed this area of need during the self-assessment process. The district is commended for increasing the graduation rate by 11% for students with disabilities during the 2002-2003 school year. Moreover, 75% of those students who graduated went on to post secondary educational programs.

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

**General Provisions, Graduation Requirements 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 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, frequency/duration of related services, length of school day/year, facilities and certification of staff.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of location of related services, provision of programs, goals/objectives/benchmarks, hearing aids, provision of speech services and transfer student procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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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, content/provision of notices of meetings, content of written notices and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, parent participation, provision of written notice, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 referral process, direct referrals parent/staff and identification meetings/timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of child find, pre-referral interventions, identification/over-representation of minority students, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, documentation of date of referral and identification meeting participants. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. Staff from the Office for Civil Rights, the NYU Equity center and from OSEP will determine the appropriateness of the district's improvement plan regarding issues related to overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

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

### ***Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments and written reports signed/dated.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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### ***Section VI:   Reevaluation***

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of planning meetings/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation timelines and reevaluations completed by June 30th of a student's last year in preschool. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 eligibility participants/meetings and signatures of agreement/disagreement rationale.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of medical assessments, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability and copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to eligibility meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP considerations, IEP meetings, age of majority, teacher responsibility and goals/objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of IEP meeting participants, IEP required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance, inclusion of goals/objectives in IEP, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents/adult students, 90-day timelines, teacher/staff access, amending IEP without benefit of IEP meeting, documentation of student progress/needs and parental participation at IEP meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of least restrictive environment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the decision-making process, consideration of supplementary aids and services, regular education access, notification/participation of nonacademic/extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, and continuum of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of statements of Transition Service Needs and Needed Transition Services, preferences/interests survey/assessment and student invitation.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency invitation, monitoring transition services provided by outside agencies and development of transition goals/objectives. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to these areas of need.

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 area of early intervention program to preschool disabilities program by age 3.

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

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

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### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plan, procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students, IEP review and documentation of provision of consultation services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified submission of records to authorities as an area of concern. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address this area. **The district will submit a plan to address this area of need.**

### **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 therapy and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and description of programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 access/requests, maintenance/destruction of records and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of access sheets and staff knowledge regarding policies and procedures regarding student records. The districts improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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 Princeton Regional School District on April 29, 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 Princeton Regional School 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 all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with one minor revision will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district as compliant with federal and state statues and regulations and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs.

General Provisions, Graduation Requirements 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.

The district's rate for placing students in the general education setting for more than 80% of the day was below the state average and placement in out-of-district settings were significantly above the state average. Additionally the district increased the graduation rate by 11% for students with disabilities during the 2002-2003 school year.

Sixteen parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Parents of in-district students praised the district for providing access to general education programs and school activities for their children. They also acknowledged that the district includes them in the decision-making process. However, parents of out-of-district students expressed concern over limited in-district activities for their children. They also voiced concerns regarding placement of students with more severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The district addressed these concerns through its improvement plan.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included extended school year, frequency/duration of related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certification of staff, consent, content /provision of notice of meetings, content of written notices, independent evaluation, referral process, direct referrals parent/staff, identification meetings/timelines, multidisciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessment, written reports signed/dated, planning meetings/participants, eligibility meetings/participants, signatures of agreement/disagreement rationale, IEP considerations, IEP meetings, age of majority, teacher responsibility, goals/objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, documentation of least restrictive environment, Transition Service Needs and Needed Transition Services, preferences/interests survey/assessment, student invitation, early intervention program to preschool disabilities program by age 3, interim alternative educational setting, 45-day return, suspension tracking, class size/waivers, age range/waivers, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, access/request, maintenance/destruction of records and documentation of other locations of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding location of related services, provision of programs, goals/objectives/benchmarks, hearing aids, provision of speech services, transfer student procedures, surrogate parents, parent participation, provision of written notices, notices in native language,

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interpreters at meetings, child find, pre-referral interventions, identification/over-representation of minority students, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, documenting date of referral, identification meeting participants, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of a students last year in preschool, ADHD medical assessment, statement of eligibility for specific learning disabilities, copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students 10 days prior to IEP meetings, IEP meeting participants, IEP required statements, Present Levels of Educational Performance, inclusion of goals and objectives in IEP, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents/adult students, 90-day timelines, teacher/staff access to IEPs, amending IEP without benefit of IEP meeting, documentation of student progress/needs, parental participation at IEP meetings, decision-making process, consideration of supplementary aides/services, regular education access, notification/participation of nonacademic/extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, continuum of programs, agency invitation, monitoring transition services provided by outside agencies, development of transition goals/objectives, preschool transition planning conferences, documentation to case manager, manifestation determination meetings, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, procedural safeguards for students who are potentially disabled, submission of records to authorities, IEP review, documentation of provision of consultation services, consultation time, description of programs, access sheets, and staff knowledge of policies and procedures regarding student records.

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

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