

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

**District:** Prospect Park School District

**County:** Passaic

**Monitoring Dates:** October 14 and 20, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Jenifer Spear, Gladys Miller and Susan Wilson

***Background Information:***

During the 2003–2004 school year, the **Prospect Park School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Prospect Park 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 **Prospect Park 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.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Prospect Park School on October 12, 2004.

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 providing four year old pre-school disabled students an opportunity to participate in an integrated pre-school setting. This allows previously self-contained pre-school disabled students to be educated in a less restrictive environment by offering general education opportunities with their non-disabled peers.

The district is commended for implementing an autistic program within the district for the 2004-2005 school year. This program has allowed previously out-of-district students to

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return to the district and be considered for opportunities to integrate with their non-disabled peers during specially scheduled activities. Rutgers University offers weekly support and professional development to the teacher, therapists and the paraprofessionals in this setting.

### **Data Summary:**

Based on a review of the data, the district has successfully placed nearly all four year old pre-school disabled students within the district's general education pre-school program. However, the district has placed nearly all three year old pre-school students in restrictive settings such as private special education schools or in the pre-school disabled program. Due to facility constraints, there is no plan identified to address the issue of three year old pre-school continuum of programs within the school building. The district has been directed to revise the improvement plan to address this area of need.

During the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, the district's percentage of out-of-district students was over 11%. For the 2004-2005 school year, the district has been able to bring several students back from their private placements to be educated within the district as a result of implementing an autistic program. This has resulted in a reduction of over 4 percentage points to 6.5%. This percentage is equivalent to the state average.

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

**General Provisions, Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation and Statewide Assessments** 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 provision of programs and the related services of speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

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

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the consideration and documentation of counseling.

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

**Consideration and Documentation of Counseling** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interview that team members counsel students but do not consistently include counseling in the IEP as a related service when a student requires it.

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- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that counseling is considered and documented in the IEP for students who require it. These activities must include a mechanism to determine whether the district has sufficient staff to address the needs of those students with disabilities in the district. If the district does not have sufficient staff, the plan must include activities to obtain additional staff members. Implementation of these activities will ensure counseling is provided to those students who require it to enable students to derive full educational benefit from their special education program.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of Child Find 3-21, the referral process, direct referrals, health summaries, vision and hearing screenings and identification meeting timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of pre-referral interventions and date stamping referrals. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the regular education participants at identification meetings.

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

**Regular Education Participants at Identification Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education participants were not consistently participating at identification meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the participation of regular education teachers at identification meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that regular education teachers have the opportunity to provide information regarding appropriate grade expectations and skills so that determinations can be made regarding the need for evaluations or suggestions for further interventions. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

### **Section VI: Re-Evaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three year timelines, planning meetings and re-evaluations conducted by June 30 of students last year in pre-school.

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

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

**Regular Education Participants at Re-Evaluation Planning Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education participants were not consistently participating at re-evaluation planning meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the participation of regular education teachers at re-evaluation meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that regular education teachers have the opportunity to provide information regarding grade level expectations, progress within the general education curriculum and whether the student continues to demonstrate a disability within the general education setting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, criteria, signatures of agreement or disagreement and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding regular education participants at eligibility meetings.

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

**Regular Education Participants at Eligibility Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education participants were not consistently participating at eligibility meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the participation of regular education teachers at eligibility meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required participants have the opportunity to provide information regarding eligibility. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding regular education participants at IEP meetings, regular and special education accommodations and modifications for students with behavioral concerns and supports for school personnel when implementing interventions and strategies to students with behavioral concerns.

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

**Regular Education Participants at IEP Meetings** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education participants were not consistently participating at IEP meetings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the participation of regular education teachers at IEP meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that regular education teachers have the opportunity to provide information regarding accommodations and modifications necessary for the student to be educated in the regular education setting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Regular and Special Education Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Behavioral Concerns** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that child study team members are providing significant behavior management techniques for students with behavioral concerns. However, documentation of these accommodations and modifications are not present in students' IEPs.

- **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 and documented in students' IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure each accommodation and modification is identified and provided to address the needs of the student, to allow the student to demonstrate acquisition of specific skills and to ensure a smooth transition for students moving from grade to grade and from the elementary setting to the secondary setting. The plan must include an administrative**

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**oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Supports for School Personnel** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that supports for school personnel are not provided to assist in implementing interventions and strategies to students with behavioral concerns.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that school personnel responsible for providing interventions and strategies to students with behavioral concerns are provided with appropriate supports and that these supports are documented in students' IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure supports are identified and provided to school personnel so that students are able to demonstrate acquisition of specific skills and demonstrate progress. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure 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 area of regular education access in district.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of opportunities for out-of-district students to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities and ensures participation in those activities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding documentation of least restrictive environment decisions and three year old pre-school continuum of programs.

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

**Documentation of Least Restrictive Environment Decisions** – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that consideration of supplemental aids and services, beneficial and harmful effects of a placement, and extent to which students will not participate with non-disabled peers in extracurricular and nonacademic activities is not documented in the IEP.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the IEP specifies the documentation of the supplemental aids and services in the mainstream considered and rejected, possible harmful effects of the placement on the student or other students and a statement regarding extracurricular and nonacademic participation. Implementation of these activities will document the decision making process and more clearly define the rationale for specific placement decisions. The plan must include**

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**an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

**Three Year Old Pre-School Continuum of Program** – During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that three year old students are not being considered or placed in general education settings.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that child study team members are provided with in-service training so that they have the understanding of the LRE requirements as well as knowledge of supports that can be provided to successfully educate pre-school students in the general education settings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that three year old pre-school students have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of placement in pre-school by age three.

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

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of alignment of goals and objectives with student outcomes, development of employment through career awareness, community experiences such as public transportation and leisure activities, partnerships with community resources and invitation to agencies. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

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During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternate educational settings and procedural safeguards.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments and manifestation determination.

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

**Behavior Improvement Plans, Functional Behavior Assessments and Manifestation Determinations** - During the on-site monitoring, record review and interviews indicated that informal behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments and manifestation determinations are being conducted and utilized but not consistently documented in the IEP where warranted.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that behavior improvement plans, functional behavior assessments and manifestation determinations are conducted and documented. Implementation of these activities will ensure appropriate behavior plans and assessments are provided to those students who require it. This will enable the IEP team and other personnel members to design an educational plan that incorporates behavioral needs of students that will allow students to derive full educational benefit from their special education program. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### **Section XIII: Graduation Requirements**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area IEP requirements at age 14.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of written notice of graduation and out-of-district participation. Prospect Park School District is a K-8 district, therefore written notice of graduation and out-of-district participation is not applicable. However, the district did identify a concern with out-of-district participation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and written notice of 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the class sizes, areas of age ranges, group sizes, home instruction and consultation time.



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

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

**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of access sheets. 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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### ***Summary***

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Prospect Park School District on October 12, 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 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 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 its creation of two new programs; pre-school integrated program for four year old students and an autistic program within the school district.

At a focus group meeting held during the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Although all parents indicated that they are very involved in the IEP process, a parent indicated that they are not made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff and parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, length of school day and year, transfer procedures, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meetings and timelines, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in pre-school, eligibility meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, signatures of agreement and disagreement, IEP meetings, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, ninety day timelines, teacher access and responsibility, regular education access in district, continuum of programs for school aged students, early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, age fourteen interests and preferences, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, procedural safeguards, interim alternate educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, IEP requirements at age 14, class sizes, age ranges, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access to records, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding extended school year, pre-referral interventions, date stamping referrals, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents, appropriate goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, nonacademic and extracurricular activities for out-of-district students, pre-school transition conference, alignment of goals and objectives with student outcomes, development of employment through careers, partnerships with community resources, invitations to transition agencies, 8<sup>th</sup> grade out-of-district

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participation in graduation, 8<sup>th</sup> grade notice of graduation, common planning time and access sheets.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding consideration and documentation of counseling as a related service, participants at identification meetings, participants at re-evaluation planning meetings, participants at eligibility meetings, participants at IEP meetings, accommodations and modifications for students with behavioral concerns, supports for school personnel providing interventions and strategies to students with behavioral concerns, documentation of LRE decision making, three year old pre-school continuum of programs, consideration and documentation of behavior improvement plans and functional behavior assessments and manifestation determination.

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