

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

**District:** Ridgefield Park School District

**County:** Bergen

**Monitoring Dates:** February 24 and 25, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Gladys Miller, Carol Raff and Jenifer Spear

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

During the 20012–2003 school year, the Ridgefield 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 Ridgefield Park 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 Ridgefield 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.

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 Ridgefield Park High School on February 24, 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 their Best Practice award for their Peer Activated Learning program. General education students throughout the grades volunteer during their playtime or recess to interact with the students in the autistic program. The teacher models specific approaches for communication with the student, increasing eye contact and teaching social skills and social strategies through meaningful play experiences.

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The district provides for extensive professional development activities that include training in a variety of areas such as preventing academic failure, cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, behavioral interventions, transition and post-secondary planning, functional behavioral assessments and applied behavior analysis. In addition the district has established a Professional Development Academy that provides workshops after school hours. Areas addressed include technology training, inclusion, gang prevention, differentiated instruction, analyzing data for applied behavioral analysis instruction, sensory integration tools for the classroom and understanding learning disabilities.

The district also provides a full continuum of services at all levels including a specialized reading and writing program for junior and senior high school students who have not responded to conventional reading remediation.

### **Part One Data Summary**

The Ridgefield Park School District reported a classification rate of 16.6% for the 2002-2003 school year, which is above the state average. The district has developed an improvement plan to address this area of need. The data submitted by the district indicated that 21.1 % of preschool disabled students are placed in general education settings which is near the state average of 23.2%. For students ages 6-21 the district educates 36.5% of their students in general education for greater than 80% of the day; 38.9% in general education 40-80% of the day; and 16.7% for less than 40% of the day. The district has increased participation of special education students in general education for the last three years and has included an improvement plan to include activities that will continue to address this area of need.

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

**General Provisions and Graduation Requirements** 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, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of goals for counseling and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 direct referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, health summary, and vision and hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process and pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of written reports and acceptance or rejection of reports. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 areas of timelines, planning meetings and participants at planning meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluating pre-school students by June 30<sup>th</sup> of their last year in pre-school. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately initiated activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

**Section VII:   Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants and signature of agreement or disagreement.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of copy of evaluation reports to parents, criteria and documentation of eligibility. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately initiated activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of meeting participants, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, considerations and required statements, present level of educational performance, age of majority and goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified a concern regarding implementation dates. 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 IX: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision making, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services and nonacademic and extracurricular participation. No improvement plan was submitted by the district. **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that the least restrictive environment section of the IEP is amended to include all required statements and considerations. It is recommended the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs. Implementation of these activities will ensure that general education with appropriate supports and services is considered and documented for individual students.**

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of student and agency invite, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs and age sixteen needed transition services. 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 Preschool**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three. 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 XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of manifestation determination and procedural safeguards.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan and interim alternative educational setting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

No additional areas of need were 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 approved accommodations and modifications, alternate assessment, participation and IEP documentation.

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

No additional areas of need were 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 age range waivers, class size waivers and home instruction notification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consultation time and group sizes for speech therapy. 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 sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, documentation of locations and staff knowledge of records policy. 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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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Ridgefield Park School District on February 24 and 25, 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 this review the district was able to identify 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 implementation of corrective action to address the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process. As a result, many of those identified areas were corrected prior to the on-site visit. 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.

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 indicated that their children were receiving a high quality education and that the staff was attentive to their needs and that of their children. Some parents voiced concerns about scheduling issues.

A review of district data indicated that the district is providing services to a significant number of students in the general education setting for more than 40% of the school day. The district has developed an improvement plan to increase the number of students participating in general education programs including pre-school students. Although overall district data reflected a classification rate above the state average, there is a decrease in the classification rate and the district has initiated specific activities to address this area of need.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, parent and professional development, extended school year, provision of programs and related services, length of school day and year, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, meetings, written notice, independent evaluations, direct referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, health summary, vision and hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, eligibility meetings, participants, signature of agreement or disagreement, annual review timelines, continuum, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards, approved accommodations and modifications, alternate assessment, participation, IEP documentation, all areas of graduation requirements, age range waiver, class size waivers, home instruction notification, access sheets and maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding goals and objectives for counseling, transfer students, surrogate parents, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, written reports, acceptance or rejection of outside reports, reevaluating pre-school students by June 30<sup>th</sup> of their last year in pre-school, providing a copy of evaluation reports to parents, documentation of eligibility, criteria, IEP meeting

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participants, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge and access, considerations and required statement, present level of educational performance, age of majority, goals and objectives related to core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, individualized decision making, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, student and agency invite, agency involvement, age fourteen transition service needs, age sixteen needed transition services, pre-school transition planning conference, early intervention to pre-school disabled by age three, documentation of discipline to case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, interim alternative educational setting, SRA process, consultation time, group sizes for speech therapy, parent and adult student access to records, documentation of locations and staff knowledge of records policy.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Ridgefield Park School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the one area that requires revisions.