

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

**District:** Ridgewood Village School District

**County:** Bergen

**Monitoring Dates:** January 6 and 7, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Jenifer Spear, Gladys Miller and Tracey Pettiford-Bugg

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Ridgewood Village School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Ridgewood Village 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 Ridgewood Village 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 Education Center on January 6, 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 its inclusion efforts for pre-school students. All in-district preschool disabled students are provided with weekly integration in one of the community based programs that are housed in the same building as the preschool disabled classes. In addition to this program, disabled students are also placed in either

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the community program or the private infant-toddler program also housed at the Glen School.

The district is also commended for training its elementary level teachers, including special education teachers, in the implementation of the Open Circle Program, a social competency program. This Open Circle Program offers opportunities to address social issues within the classroom by providing effective strategies to teachers so they may better address social problems that arise among their students.

The district is also commended for Project Success. This program is an adaptive physical education program for students with motor weaknesses. Project Success offers supportive services within the regular education physical education department with consultation by physical therapists.

### **Data Summary:**

Data from the 2001-2002 school year indicated its preschool disabled students were educated in general education settings at a lower percentage than that of the state's. However, the district is commended for its successful efforts during the past and current school years to increase the number of preschoolers who are educated with their non-disabled peers. The district's data from the 2000, 2001, and the 2002 school years indicated that over 62% of the students eligible for special education and related services were educated in general education settings for more than 80% of the day. This is above the state average of 40.7%, 42% and 41.6% respectively. 14.1%.

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

**Statewide Assessment** was determined to be an area 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 policies and procedures, parent training and dissemination of IDEA information.

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

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

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### **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 and year, certifications, frequency, duration, and location of related services, facilities and certifications

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of related services, goals and objectives for speech, transfer students and documentation of extended school year. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of provision of related services, transfer students and goals and objectives for speech therapy. During the on-site visit, record review and interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities and provided additional staff to bring provision of related services into compliance. Documentation of extended school year is addressed with considerations and required statements in the Section VIII, IEP.

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 area of meetings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, notices in native language and interpreters at meetings, provision of Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE) and independent evaluations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 area of vision screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of Child Find, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meeting participants and timelines, health summary and hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. Activities for health summaries and hearing screenings have been initiated and have resulted in the correction of these areas prior to the on-site visit.

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### **Section V: Evaluation**

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

During the self-assessment, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and bilingual evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, components of written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, speech language assessments and speech screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluation for a change in placement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 and criteria.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants at eligibility meetings, provision of a copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the eligibility meeting, signatures of agreement and disagreement and documentation of eligibility. 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 VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of ninety-day timelines.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of IEP meetings and participants, provision of IEPs to parents, teacher knowledge, responsibility and access, parental opportunity to observe placement, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines and annual determination of placement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. However, it is recommended that the district adopt the IEP format developed by the Office of Special Education Programs.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring regarding implementation dates for annual reviews.

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

**Implementation Dates for Annual Reviews** – During the on-site monitoring visit, interviews and record review indicated that nearly all annual reviews are conducted during the last few months of the school year. The IEP indicates an implementation date of the first day of the next school year and includes the program that will be implemented at that time; it does not include a program that will be implemented from the date of the annual review to the end of the current school year. As a result, these students do not have a valid IEP in place for the last few months of the school year.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure annual reviews of IEPs include the program and services the students will receive through the end of the school year as well as the program and services for the coming school year. Implementation of the activities will ensure that students have a valid IEP from the date of the annual review to the beginning of the new school year as well as the next school year.**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individual decision-making, Oberti statements, supplementary aids and services, regular education access for preschoolers and nonacademic and extracurricular participation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding continuum of programs.

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

**Continuum of Programs** – During the on-site visit, staff interviews and record review indicated that though preschoolers and elementary age students have access to a full continuum of placement options, including in-class support, once they articulate to the middle school and high school levels, in-class support is no longer available.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure students continue to have access to in-class support programs**

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when they articulate to the secondary level. Implementation of these activities will ensure middle and high school students with disabilities continue to receive the supports and services they require to be successfully educated with their non-disabled peers in general education settings.

**Section X: Transition to Pre-school**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and placement in pre-school program by age three.

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 a concern in the area of student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services and links with community resources. The district's plan is sufficient to address these areas. Activities for the entire area of transition have been initiated.

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 procedural safeguards, suspension tracking and interim alternate education setting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, behavior intervention plans, functional behavioral assessment and manifestation determinations. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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**Section XIII: Graduation Requirements**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of graduation requirements and choice of diploma.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notification to students placed out-of-district and written notice of graduation. 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 XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class descriptions and special programs. 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 XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent and adult student access to records, access sheets, and knowledge of policies and procedures. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 Ridgewood Village School District on January 6 and 7, 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 all but two 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.

The district is commended for its efforts to increase the number of pre-school students with disabilities who are educated in general education and integrated settings. Additionally, data indicates the district educates a significant number of school aged students in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day.

At a focus group meeting held during the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Many parents felt that the pre-school and elementary settings were extremely supportive and that they were very involved in their children's programs. However, as students transition to the middle and high school levels, parents indicated that the continuum of program options did not include in-class support. Additionally, parents indicated that students with disabilities must make a choice between taking a foreign language or academic support classes since these classes are scheduled during the same instructional period. Two parents expressed concerns regarding the lack of specialized reading instruction at the secondary level.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, parent training, dissemination of IDEA information, length of day and year, frequency, duration, and location of related services, facilities, certifications, meetings, vision screenings, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings, eligibility criteria, age of majority, ninety day timelines, preschool transition conference, early intervention to preschool program by age three, procedural safeguards, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational setting, participation in statewide assessments, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation requirements, choice of diploma, class size, age range, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other location

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff training, extended school year, provision of related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, consent, notices of meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, provision of PRISE, independent evaluations, child find three – twenty-one, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, identification meetings, participants and timelines, health summary, hearing screenings, multi-disciplinary evaluations, functional assessments, components of written reports, acceptance and rejection of reports, speech language assessments, speech screening,



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need for reevaluations, reevaluation for change in placement, eligibility participants, copy of evaluation to parents, signatures of agreement and disagreement, documentation of eligibility, IEP meetings and participants, IEPs to parents, teacher knowledge and responsibilities, opportunity to observe placement, considerations and required statements, PLEP, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, annual review timelines, annual placement determination, individual decision making, Oberti statements, supplementary aids and services, regular education access for preschool students, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, student and agency invitation, agency involvement, age 14 transition service needs, age 16 needed transition services, links with community resources, documentation to case manager, behavior improvement plan, functional behavior analysis, manifestation determination, notice of out-of-district participation in graduation, written notice of graduation, class descriptions, special class programs aligned to core curriculum content standards, parent and adult student access to records, access sheets and knowledge of policies and procedures.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding implementation dates of IEPs and continuum of programs for students on the middle and high school level.

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