

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

**District:** Riverton Borough School District

**County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** November 19, 2003

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

***Background Information:***

During the 2002–2003 school year, the Riverton Borough School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Riverton Borough 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 Riverton Borough 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 Riverton Borough Public School on October 16, 2003. 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 contracting with a behaviorist for those students in need of a behavioral program beyond the scope of traditional behavior modification programs. The district provides home-based consultation and behavioral programming for parents as needed. In addition the child study team is available to work with students as needed

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with regards to organizational skills, study skills and homework completion. They provide for both regular education and special education students' homework checkout to ensure students are not forgetting to bring homework home for completion. The district also provides the Homework Club after school to aid students with homework completion and test preparation.

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

The 2001-2002 placement data submitted by Riverton Borough School district indicated that for the past three years, students have been placed in general education settings for more than 80% of the school day at a rate that is 7% above the state's average. While this is a positive trend, the district has identified a need for improvement and plans to expand its in-class support program. The classification rate for the Riverton Borough School district is 17.6% which is above the state average of 13.4%. The district identified this as an area of need through self-assessment and has addressed it in their improvement plan.

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

**Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures, Discipline, Statewide Assessments, Programs and Services and Student Records** 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 policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development. 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.

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

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

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding frequency, location, and duration of services and extended school year.

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### **Areas of Need:**

**Frequency, Location, and Duration of Services** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that duration and location of services are not consistently documented in IEPs. In addition, counseling services indicate a range of time that services will be delivered, such as “30-40 minutes”. As a result it is unclear where, when, and for how long the services are provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that frequency, location, and duration of related services are consistently documented in IEPs. Implementation of these activities will ensure staff and parents are aware of the amount of time the student will be removed from special education programming. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that extended school year is not considered for every student who is eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to includes activities to ensure that extended school year is considered and documented for every student eligible for speech and language services. Implementation of these activities will ensure every student who requires extended school year services will receive those services to address identified issues of regression and recoupment. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notice, native language and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of content of notice of a meeting relative to transition. The district’s improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants.

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

**Meeting participants** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that special education teachers are not always in attendance at meetings.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that special education teachers are attending meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure required individuals will be in attendance to discuss programming and services issues and to participate in the decision-making process. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and identification meeting participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of health summary and vision and hearing screenings. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because the plan lacks activities and an administrative oversight to ensure health summaries and vision and hearing screenings are consistently completed at the time of the identification meeting. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.**

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

**Section VI: Reevaluation**

**Summary of Finding:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of three-year timelines and reevaluation planning meeting.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students last year in preschool. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because although the plan indicates they will complete reevaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of the student's last year in preschool it does not identify how this will be accomplished or what administrative oversight activity will be implemented to ensure consistent implementation of the this new procedure.**

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 criteria, statement of eligibility and signatures of agreement/disagreement rationale.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students ten days prior to the eligibility meeting. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because although the plan indicates they will provide a copy of evaluation reports ten days prior the meeting it does not identify how this will be accomplished or what administrative oversight activity will be implemented to ensure consistent implementation of this new procedure. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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 meeting/participants, considerations/required statements, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with Core Curriculum Content Standards, age of majority, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, 90-day timelines, teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parents being afforded the opportunity to observe potential placements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding implementation dates and identification of type of program.

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

**Implementation Dates-** During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that IEP implementation dates do not include extended school year.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that extended school year implementation dates are identified. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Type of Program** – During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and staff interviews that IEPs for students who receive in-class support do not specify the content area that in-class support will be provided.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that IEPs for students who receive in-class support document the content area in which the in-class support will be provided. Implementation of these activities will ensure the accurate placement of students in identified content areas. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **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, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aides and services, regular education access, and notification and participation of nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of continuum of programs. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because although the plan indicates that the district will increase program options, it does not identify how this will be accomplished. The district's improvement plan needs to be revised to include this component.**

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 age 14 transition service needs, preferences and interests, survey and assessments.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of student and agency invitation. 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 preschool transition planning conference and early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3.

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

### **Section XIII: Graduation requirements are not applicable in this district.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Riverton Borough Public School District on November 18, 2003. 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 district data indicated the district is above the state average for preschool school students placed in general education settings. For the past three years the district has consistently been 7% above the state average for placement of students in general education. This past year the district has begun to increase the number of in-class support sections.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and child study teams accessibility. They expressed concerns with regular education teachers and their lack of knowledge of IEPs and implementation of modifications. Parents expressed a desire to begin a support group at the conclusion of the NJDOE meeting.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included protection in evaluation and evaluation procedures, discipline, statewide assessments, programs and services and student records.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies and procedures and dissemination of IDEA information, related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, independent evaluations, child find, referral process, identification meetings, timelines, reevaluation planning meetings, criteria, statement of eligibility, signature of agreement/disagreement rationale, IEP meetings, considerations required statements, present level of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with core Curriculum Content Standards, timelines, IEPs to parents, teacher access and responsibility, decision-making process, Oberti, consideration and required statements, regular education access, notification and participation in out-of-district nonacademic and extracurricular activities, preschool transition planning conference, early intervention to preschool disabled by age 3, age 14 transition service needs and preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, content of notice of meeting, health summary, vision and hearing screening, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of students' last year in preschool, copy of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to meeting, parents have opportunity to observe placement, continuum of programs and student and agency invitation.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding frequency, location, and duration of related services, extended school year, meeting participants, implementation dates and type of program.

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