

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

**District:** Southern Regional High School District

**County:** Ocean

**Monitoring Dates:** May 4, 2005

**Monitor:** Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards

***Background Information:***

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Southern Regional High School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Southern Regional High School District with an opportunity to evaluate performance, 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 assist the district in identifying areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Southern Regional High School District developed an improvement plan to address these identified areas of need.

As the first step to verifying the self-assessment findings, to assessing the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and to determining any progress in implementing this plan, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members, at the high school on the evening of April 14, 2005. Information obtained from this meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities.

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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's superintendent, special education administrators, speech therapists and child study team members.

***District Strengths:***

The Southern Regional School District is commended for the extensive transition activities offered for both general education and special education students. The district provides a School-to-Career program which enables all students to develop a career plan as they progress through high school. A portion of the curriculum is delivered through the guidance department utilizing a career software package and classroom activities. Through the program, students are able to assess interests, abilities, and values. Students are also able to obtain information about occupations, educational

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requirements and planning for entrance into the workforce. In addition to this program, career education is also infused throughout the high school curriculum. Teachers choose a variety of methods for students to showcase their career choices. A career facilitator is also available to assist staff members in implementing these activities. Southern Regional is also one of only a few schools to provide supportive employment services during the student's last year of school. Services are provided by Waters and Sims, an employment agency. Since this agency also provides services to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, students experience a smoother transition to the post-secondary environment. Students in self-contained programs also participate in a number of life skills activities, including a balloon and greeting card business at the Middle School and the Southern Emporium at the High School.

The district is further commended for the vast array of extra-curricular activities offered to both general education and special education students. Some of these activities include STYLE (Students Teaching Youth Leadership Experiences) and MAKEPEACE (Peer Mediation). The STYLE program annually trains 45 eighth graders to provide leadership programs within the district and throughout the county. The students develop individual and group service plans that involve training their school age peers in implementing a variety of positive initiatives. These trained student leaders continue to be involved in leadership activities throughout high school and in turn train their successors. Some of their initiatives include healthy dating relationships, support services for senior citizens and anti-bullying and violence reduction activities for area elementary schools. The MAKEPEACE program trains 40-50 students each year in techniques and strategies for resolving conflicts in a non-violent manner. In addition, peer mediators visit the various sending districts to prepare fifth graders for their transition to middle school.

### ***Data Summary:***

A review of the data submitted by the Southern Regional School District as a result of the self-assessment process indicates that the classification rate has been above the state average for the past few years. Approximately 18% of the student population is classified eligible for special education. The district attributes this, in part, to a higher number of classified pupils transitioning from the local sending districts; however, the district did identify this as an area of need and addressed it in the improvement plan.

A further review of the data indicates that placement rates are roughly commensurate with state averages; however fewer students are placed in out-of-district settings. The district attributes this to the development of two in-district programs. The Compass Program is designed to address the needs of classified pupils with behavior and emotional issues. The Mainsail Program is designed to address the needs of at-risk youth, including both general education and special education students. Both of these programs have increased the district's capacity to accommodate students at the local district level while affording them the opportunity for interaction with their non-disabled peers.

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

**Statewide Assessment and Graduation** 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.

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### ***Section I: General Provisions***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance 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 training for parents and staff development for elective teachers. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 compliance in the areas of provision of IEP programs and related services, length of school day/year, and facilities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of procedures for maintaining hearing aids, extended school year, counseling, procedures for revising IEPs, and transfer procedures. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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 compliance in the areas of consent, meetings, content of written notice and notice of a meeting, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notice in native language, provision of interpreters at meetings, and timelines for providing written notice. On-site monitoring determined that the district has 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 IV: Location, Referral and Identification***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the area of procedures for making direct referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding Child Find, referral procedures, identification meeting timelines, and health appraisals. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas. The district further identified concerns regarding classification rate and documentation of pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

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 compliance in the areas of multidisciplinary and standardized evaluations, written reports, bilingual evaluations, and documentation of acceptance and/or rejection of evaluation reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of functional assessments. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 compliance in the areas of planning meetings and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of reevaluation timelines. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, participants, and statements of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of provision of evaluation reports to parents, timelines for outside evaluations, certification of agreement/disagreement, required assessments, and criteria for eligibility. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented 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 compliance in the areas of meetings/participants, goals and objectives and their alignment with the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCSs), implementation dates, age of majority, and teacher access/responsibility for the IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of 90 day timelines, procedures for providing parents with a copy of the IEP prior to implementation, ensuring that an IEP is in effect prior to placement, reports of progress to parents, present levels of educational performance, including behavior intervention plans in IEPs, and annual reviews. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti, consideration of supplemental aids and services, and general education access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notification/participation in nonacademic and extra-curricular activities and continuum, specifically a need for more in-class support. On-site monitoring determined that the district has 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 X: Transition to Post-School**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of student and agency invitations, statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, procedures for conducting individual assessments, establishing partnerships with community resources, and monitoring the implementation of transition services provided by outside agencies.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of student preparation for transition meetings, specifically determining interests and preferences. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 compliance in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, manifestation determination, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavioral assessments, procedures for short-term and long-term removals, and procedures for placement in interim alternative educational settings (IAES).

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of notification of removals to case managers. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 compliance in the areas of age range, group sizes for speech therapy, common planning time, and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of group size for resource programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this issue. On-site monitoring determined that the district has addressed the issue for pull-out resource programs, but is still in the process of implementing activities to address group size for in-class support.

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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 compliance in the areas of parent and adult-student access to records, access sheets, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation of locations of other records. On-site monitoring determined that the district has implemented activities to bring about correction in this area.

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 Southern Regional High School District on May 4, 2005. 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 its exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the prompt implementation of improvement plan activities. As a result, nearly all areas of need were verified as corrected prior to the on-site visit. The district is also 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 data indicated the district has reduced the number of students placed in out-of-district settings over the last few years, which is attributed to the establishment of two in-district alternative programs. The data show a classification rate higher than the state average. The district has identified this as an area of need and has developed an improvement plan to address the issue.

Approximately 13 parents attended a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit. Parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Concerns were addressed regarding transition planning and out-of-district placements; however on-site monitoring activities determined that these issues were not systemic in nature.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included Statewide Assessment and Graduation.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included special education policies and procedures, dissemination of IDEA information, provision of related services, length of school day/year, facilities, certification, consent, independent evaluations, evaluations, reevaluations, eligibility determination, IEP development, age of majority, individualized decision-making, access to regular education, transition planning, discipline procedures, provision of programs and services, and procedures for maintenance and destruction of pupil records.

Areas of need originally identified by the district but determined to have been corrected prior to the on-site monitoring visit by the NJDOE include parent training, staff development for elective teachers, procedures for maintaining hearing aids, extended school year, counseling, procedures for revising IEPs, transfer procedures, surrogate parents, native language, written notice timelines, Child Find, referral procedures, identification meeting timelines, health appraisals, reevaluation timelines, provision of evaluation reports to parents, timelines for outside evaluations, certification of agreement/disagreement, required assessments, criteria for eligibility, 90 day timelines, provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation, ensuring that an IEP is in effect prior to placement, reports of progress to parents, present levels of educational performance, behavior intervention plans, annual reviews, notification/participation in



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nonacademic and extra-curricular activities, expansion of in-class support offerings, determining interests and preferences, notification of removals to case managers, and documentation of locations of other records.

During the self-assessment process, the district also identified areas of need regarding classification rate, pre-referral interventions and group size for resource programs. The district will continue to address classification rate through improvement plan activities. Verification of compliance in the remaining two areas will be conducted by the County Office of Education.

No additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit; therefore, no revisions to the improvement plan submitted in June 2004 are required.