

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

**District:** Sparta School District

**County:** Sussex

**Monitoring Dates:** February 25, 26 and 27

**Monitoring Team:** Zola Mills, Damen Cooper, Michael Lee and Jennifer DeSaye

### **Background Information:**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Sparta School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Sparta 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 Sparta School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Mohawk Avenue School on February 13, 2002. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district should be commended for taking the initiative to open a pre-school program for students with autism and to their commitment to extend this program as the children progress. The district demonstrates a strong commitment to professional development

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offering over twenty workshops during the school year for staff and ten sessions through their Parent Academy for parents of all students.

The district has been awarded various prizes for its strong music program including its jazz band, orchestra, chorus and choir. The district has received many NJ School Board Association awards for their SAFE program, Curriculum Guides and School Calendars and its American Sign Language Program. The K-2 Literacy Skills/Phonemic Awareness program has also been recognized for excellence.

The district should further be commended for their long-term plan to include technology in the classroom. Currently, there are at least three computers and a printer in each classroom as well as computer labs in each building. The district also utilizes a Kurzweil system, which allows written material to be scanned to produce auditory/verbal output.

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

**Least Restrictive Environment, 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.

#### **I. General Provisions**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of policies and procedures, parent development and dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified a concern regarding professional development. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these elements.

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

#### **II. F.A.P.E.**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of related services, length of school day/year and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

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### **III. Procedural Safeguards**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices of meetings in native language, certification of independent evaluators and written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

No additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit.

### **IV. Location, Referral, Identification**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of direct referrals, summer referrals, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings and identification meeting participants and timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of Child Find and the referral process. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of Child Find. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address the referral process because it lacks a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of the in-service training. The district needs to revise the plan to include this component.

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

### **V. Evaluation**

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

During 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 for students eligible for speech and language services, written reports and acceptance/rejection of outside reports. 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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**VI.     Reevaluation**

**Summary of Finding:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines for turning age five. 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 visit.

**VII.    Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns with meetings, criteria, documentation of eligibility and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. 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.

**VIII.   IEP**

**Summary of Findings:**

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participants at IEP meetings, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the core curriculum content standards, age of majority, regular education access, and continuum.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern regarding the provision of the IEP to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need. The district further identified a concern with the provision of related services throughout the school year. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

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### **X. Transition to Post-School**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of agency invitation and needed services at age sixteen.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of agency participation in transition meetings, identification of a community liaison and transition service needs at age fourteen, including courses of study and preferences/interests. 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.

#### **Transition to Preschool**

During self-assessment the district identified a concern regarding the lack of notification from the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure the district has the opportunity to participate in the transition conference and completion of re-evaluations by June 30<sup>th</sup> of the last year of preschool eligibility. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The district will revise its improvement plan to include these components.

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

### **XI. Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans and functional behavior assessments.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern regarding discipline procedures, documentation to case managers, manifestation determinations, and interim alternative educational settings. 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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**XII. Statewide Assessment**

**Summary of findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of participation, approved accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation and alternate assessment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of identification of students eligible to participate in the special review assessment and child study team knowledge of the content of statewide assessments. 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.

**XIII. Graduation**

**Summary of findings:**

During the self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of diploma, participation and written notice.

During the self-assessment process the district identified a concern with graduation requirements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding written notice of graduation. The district addressed this need by adopting the state notice form in September 2001. The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the use of this notice.

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Sparta School District on February 26, 27 and 28, 2002. 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 thorough and comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify nearly 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 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. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Many parents praised the high college acceptance rate of the district students.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included general provisions, extended school year, facilities, certifications, obtaining consent, holding of meetings, native language and independent evaluations, direct referrals (parent/staff), summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, health summaries, participants and timelines for identification meeting, standardized assessments, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, planning meetings, participants at planning meeting, eligibility meeting participants, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, goals and objective aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review and ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, transition to post school, agency invitation and needed services at age sixteen, EIP to PSD by age three, suspension tracking, BIP/FBA, participation in statewide assessment, accommodations/modifications, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation IEP requirements, diploma, participation, written notice, programs and services class size/waiver, age range/waiver, group sizes for speech therapy, home instruction, parent/adult student access, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of student records and documentation of locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, provision of related services, length of school year, transfer students, surrogate parents, notices of meetings, written notice, Child Find 3-21, referral processes, multi-disciplinary assessments, functional assessments for ESLs students, written reports, acceptance/rejection of reports, turning age five, eligibility meetings, criteria, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, preschool transition planning conference, agency involvement in transition, age fourteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, manifestation determination, IAES, and graduation IEP requirements.

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The on-site visit identified an additional area of need regarding written notice of graduation.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.