

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

**District:** Stafford Township School District

**County:** Ocean

**Monitoring Dates:** June 6, 7, 8, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Julia Harmelin, Caryl Carthew, Ken Richards, Jane Marano

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

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Stafford Township School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Stafford Township School District with an opportunity to evaluate 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 Stafford Township 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 Ocean Acres Elementary School on November 17, 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. A representative sample of student records was also reviewed. Interviews were conducted with the district's special education administrators, superintendent, assistant superintendents, building principals, general education and special education teachers, guidance counselors, speech therapists and child study team members.

### **District Strengths:**

The district employs family-school liaisons who provide the bridge between home and school. The family school liaison also serves as the Intervention and Referral Services team chairperson.

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The district utilizes teacher consultants who mentor teachers and assist in providing training in differentiated instruction so that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

### **Data Summary:**

The Stafford Township School District reported a classification rate of 14.8% for the 2003-2004 school year, which is below the state average of 16.3%. The overall classification rate has decreased over the past three years from 18.76% in 2002 to 14.8% in 2004. The data submitted by the district indicated that the percentage of special education students placed in out-of-district settings is 1.9%, which is below the state average. The percentage of students in general education for more than 80% of the school day increased by 2% from 2003 to 2004 to 63.8%, which is significantly above the state average for that year.

With regard to preschool settings, 94.8% (55 students) of the students with IEPs are receiving services in special education settings. During the self-assessment, the district identified continuum of programs as an area of need to expand program options.

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

**General Provisions, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation and Programs and Services** 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 compliance in the areas of provision of programs and speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy, length of year, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of hearing aid policy. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year, provision of counseling as a related service, length of school day, and transfer students.

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

**Extended School Year (ESY)**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that ESY is not discussed at all IEP meeting for students eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that extended school year is discussed, considered, and that decisions are documented for all students, including those students receiving related services. Implementation of these activities will result in**

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the consideration of regression/recoupment issues for all students with disabilities and the provision of an extended school year program for students when needed. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

**Provision of Counseling as a Related Service**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that counseling services are not consistently provided as per students' IEPs.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that counseling is consistently provided and documented as per students' IEPs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Length of School Day**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the length of the school day for classes for students with multiple disabilities and students with autism at the Oxycocus school is an hour and ten minutes less in duration than the length of the school day for other classes.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that all students have access to a full-length school day in all schools, and that the length of school day is reflected in student IEPs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Transfer Students**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district does not write an interim IEP for transfer students whose placement does not match the incoming IEP.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that an interim IEP is developed for all transfer students whose placement does not match the incoming IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the appropriate team personnel have had an opportunity to review relevant evaluation information prior to making placement decisions, and that an appropriate IEP is in place for all students. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent, notice of meetings, meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of surrogate parent policy. Although the district initially identified this as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate correction in this area.

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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 compliance in the areas of child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, and health summary.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding vision and hearing screenings, evaluation planning meeting participants and timelines.

**Vision and Hearing Screenings**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that vision and hearing screenings are not conducted for preschool students referred by parents to the child study team prior to the identification meeting.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a vision and hearing screening is conducted, or that the results of a current vision and hearing screening are provided for all preschool students referred to the Child Study Team for evaluation, prior to the identification meeting, regardless of the source of the referral. Implementation of these activities will result in the team having necessary information to identify suspected areas of disabilities and to determine whether an evaluation is warranted. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Identification Meeting Participants and Timelines**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that identification meetings are not held for students referred for speech and language services. Interviews indicated a lack of awareness of meeting requirements. In addition, it was determined that general education teachers are not present for identification meetings for preschool students.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that identification meetings are convened within the required 20 days, which all required participants are in attendance, and that notice of a meeting and written notice of decisions made are provided to parents. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the required decision-makers have the opportunity to participate in determining the need for an evaluation that determinations are made in a timely fashion, and that parents are fully informed of the results of the meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **Section V: Evaluation**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students evaluated for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, and documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding speech and language evaluations.

#### **Area of Need:**

**Speech and Language Evaluations**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that when students are referred for a speech and language evaluation, a written report of evaluation findings is not always prepared. A report is prepared if the student is being evaluated as part of a full Child Study Team evaluation; however, a report is not prepared if the student is referred directly to the speech-language specialist for articulation disorders. In addition, the evaluation process does not consistently include all of the required components of a functional assessment, primarily observation of the student in other than a testing session.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports are prepared, signed, and dated for students evaluated for all speech disorders, including articulation, and that the evaluations include all of the required components of a functional assessment. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the required information is available for decision making. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of planning meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, notices, parental consent, and meetings for students turning age 5.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of timelines. Although this was initially identified as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding reevaluation meetings for students not eligible for speech and language services, undue delay for preschool students, and planning meeting participants.

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### Areas of Need:

**Reevaluation Meetings for Students Receiving Speech and Language Services—**During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that meetings are not held for students who may no longer require speech and language services.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a reevaluation planning meeting is held when the speech-language specialist determines that a student may no longer require services. The meeting should address whether an evaluation is warranted, and the nature and scope, if warranted. Notice of the meetings and written notice must be provided to the parent. Documentation of participation must be maintained. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the parent is fully informed of and participates in all evaluation and eligibility determinations and is provided with written notice of all decisions. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Undue Delay for Preschool Students—**During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the district is holding reevaluation planning well in advance of conducting evaluations for students who will be exiting preschool.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that reevaluations are completed without undue delay for preschool students. Implementation of these activities will result in reevaluations that are more relevant to the student's current needs. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Reevaluation Meeting Participants—**During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that there is no documentation that the required participants attend reevaluation meetings.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the appropriate participants consistently attend all reevaluation meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the appropriate people are involved in decision making. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding participants, written notice of eligibility for students evaluated for speech and language services, and copies of evaluation reports to parents.

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

**Eligibility Meeting Participants**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that a general education teacher does not attend initial eligibility conferences for students referred for speech and language services, and reevaluation eligibility conferences for students referred for speech and language services and for students in self-contained classes.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a general education teacher is in attendance at all eligibility meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required school personnel have the opportunity to participate in the determination of eligibility. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Written Notice of Eligibility for Students Evaluated for Speech and Language Services**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that written notice of eligibility does not include all of the required components for students evaluated for speech and language services, and it is not provided within 15 days of the meeting.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that written notice, including all of the required components, is provided to parents whenever an eligibility determination is made for either special education or related services or for speech-language services only. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are fully informed as to the decisions made regarding eligibility. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Copies of Evaluation Reports to Parents**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that evaluation reports are not consistently provided to parents ten days prior to the eligibility conference.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that evaluation reports, including those for students receiving speech and language reports, are provided to parents at least ten days prior to the eligibility conference. Implementation of these activities will**

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ensure that parents have the opportunity to review evaluation findings prior to the eligibility meeting. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

### ***Section VIII: Individualized Education Program (IEP)***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of meetings, required components, present levels of performance, goals and objectives relative to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, age of majority, and annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of related services provided from September through June, teacher access and responsibility, parent copy of IEP prior to implementation, and 90-day timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

#### **Area of Need:**

**IEP Meeting Participants**—During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that a general education teacher does not attend IEP meetings for preschool students and students placed in self-contained classes.

- **The district will develop an improvement plan to include activities to ensure that a general education teacher is in attendance at all IEP meetings, including students in preschool and self-contained classes. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all required school personnel have the opportunity to participate in the IEP meeting and in all discussions regarding the student. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of nonacademic and extracurricular participation and continuum. The district identified lack of procedures as barriers to compliance. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The district must revise the plan to include this component.**



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

### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of procedures, procedural safeguards, functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative educational settings, and manifestation determinations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, and behavior intervention plans. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks an administrative oversight component. The plan must be revised to include this component.** Although the district initially identified documentation to case manager as an area of need, the district was able to demonstrate that they have brought about correction in this area.

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/adult student requests, maintenance, and destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified no concerns.

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 Stafford Township School District on June 6, 7, 8, 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 acknowledged for the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify the majority of the areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision, will be sufficient to bring about systemic change. The district is further acknowledged for the prompt implementation of corrective action to address some of the areas of need identified during the self-assessment process.

A review of data indicated the district has decreased the number of students requiring educational placements outside of the district by creating an additional program for students with behavior disabilities this year. In addition, there has been an increase in the percentage of students educated in general education more than 80% of the school day. The district has decreased their overall classification rate by providing students with accommodations in general education and providing successful staff training.

At a focus group meeting held following the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services. Parents reported that they were satisfied with the academic content and level of curricula for their children, stating that they have witnessed improvements in their children's performance and skills. Concerns were raised regarding least restrictive environment, teacher responsibility of IEPs, sending IEPs to parents, and inconsistency of case managers. These are all issues that were identified by the district as areas of need and have been addressed through the district's improvement plan.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included General Provisions, Transition, Statewide Assessment, Graduation, and Programs and Services.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of related services except counseling, length of year, facilities, oversight of IEP implementation, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, meetings, written notice, notices in native language, interpreters, independent evaluations, child find ages 3-21, referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, health summary, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments for students evaluated for special education and related services, bilingual evaluations, documentation of acceptance and rejection of reports, reevaluation planning meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, notices, parental consent, meetings for students turning age five, eligibility meetings, criteria, IEP meetings, required components, present levels of performance, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, age of majority, annual review timelines, individualized decision-making, considerations and documentation, supplemental aids and services, general education access, discipline procedures, procedural safeguards for discipline, functional behavioral assessments, interim alternative educational settings, manifestation determination meetings, parent and adult student access to records, and maintenance and destruction of records.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding related services provided from September through June, teacher access and responsibility, parent copy of IEP prior to implementation, 90-day timelines, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, suspension tracking, and behavior intervention plans.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, provision of counseling as a related service, length of school day, transfer students, vision and hearing screenings, evaluation planning meeting participants and timelines, speech and language evaluations, planning meetings for students potentially not eligible for speech and language services, undue delay for preschool students, planning meeting participants, eligibility meeting participants, written notice of eligibility for students evaluated for speech and language services, copies of evaluation reports to parents, and IEP meeting participants.

The district corrected many areas of need prior to the on-site monitoring visit, including hearing aid policy, surrogate parent policy, reevaluation timelines, and documentation of suspensions to case manager.

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Stafford Township School District will revise the improvement plan in the areas identified in the report and submit the revisions to the Office of Special Education Programs.