

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

**District:** Upper Deerfield Township School District    **County:** Cumberland

**Monitoring Dates:** May 6, 10 and 11, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Kenneth Richards and Patricia Fair

***Background Information:***

During the 2003– 2004 school year, the Upper Deerfield 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 Upper Deerfield 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 Upper Deerfield 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 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 Elizabeth Moore Elementary School on May 10, 2005. 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 superintendent of schools, special education administrator, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapists and child study team members.

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### **District Strengths:**

The district is commended for establishing integrated preschool programs through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Education.

The district recognizes the accomplishments of both general education and special education students. Programs and activities such as Keys to Excellence, Honors Breakfast, Buzzing Bees/Good Bee-Behavior and the National Junior Honor Society recognize academic achievement and the demonstration of positive character traits throughout the district.

Students in grades one through three benefit from the opportunity to participate in the Homework Assistance Program. General education and special education students, based on teacher recommendation, receive homework support twice a week from October through mid May.

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

A review of data indicates that the district's classification rate was 11.36% for the 2004 school year which was below the state classification rate of 14.61% for that year. During the last three years, the district's classification rate has decreased by 2.22%. Despite this positive trend, the district identified a need to more effectively address pre-referral interventions. The district developed an improvement plan to address this area of need.

A further review of data indicates that over that last three years, the percentage of students with disabilities placed in general education for more than 80% of the school day has increased by 14.3%. During the 2004 school year, 46.3% of students with disabilities were in general education classes more than 80% of the school day as compared the state average of 41.9%. As a result of the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of general education access and implementation of appropriate supplemental aides and services for students to participate in the general education classroom. The district has begun to implement activities to address this area of concern.

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

**Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, Programs and Services and Student Records** were determined to be areas of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the OSEP during the on-site visit.

### ***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.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of consideration of extended school year for students eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

**Area of Need:**

**Extended School Year** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that in addition to the area of need identified by the district, when an extended school year program is warranted as determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, goals and objectives and a description of the program are not included in IEPs. Furthermore, IEPs developed for students eligible for speech and language services do not identify the criteria used in determining need for extended school year programs.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the IEP includes all required documentation, including goals and objectives, program description and the criteria considered to determine the need for the extended school year program. Implementation of these activities will ensure extended school year programs are considered for all students with disabilities regardless of placement and category of disability. The plan must also include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Section III: Procedural Safeguards**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations and notice of meeting for students eligible for special education and related services.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding notice in native language and notice of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services.

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### **Areas of Need:**

**Native Language** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that notices are not consistently provided to parents in their native language.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure parents receive notice in the native language of the parent. Implementation of these activities will ensure the parent is fully informed of the purposes of meetings, their rights with regard to the meetings and decisions made. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Notice of Meeting Components** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review determined that notices of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services do not contain all required components. The notice did not consistently inform the parents of their rights to invite others with expertise, inform the parent that transition services will be discussed and document the provision of PRISE.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all notices of meetings include all required components. It is recommended that the district adopt the notice of meeting forms developed by the OSEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that parents are informed of their rights. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, direct staff and parental referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of pre-referral interventions. 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 child find activities, health summary and vision and hearing screenings.

### **Areas of Need:**

**Child Find Activities** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that child find activities are limited to children ages 3 to 5.

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- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure child find activities include students age 3 to 21 including students who attend nonpublic schools and reside in the district. Implementation of these activities will ensure students who may have a disability due to physical, sensory, emotional, communication, cognitive or social are located, referred and identified. The plan must include an administrative oversight mechanism to ensure the implementation of the procedure.

**Health Summary and Vision and Hearing Screening** - During the on-site monitoring visit, information obtained through record review and the interview process determined that a health summary and vision and hearing screening are not conducted prior to an identification meeting.

- The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure a vision and hearing screening and health summary is available for review at the time of the identification meeting. Implementation of these activities will ensure information is available at the time of the identification meeting to determine the need for an evaluation and, if needed, the assessments that will be conducted. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

### ***Section V: Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services. The district also accurately identified compliance in the areas of functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of content of written reports for students eligible for speech and language services. 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 VII: Eligibility***

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of conducting eligibility meetings, required participants, eligibility criteria, statement of eligibility, and the provision of evaluation reports to parents ten days prior to the meeting for students classified as eligible for special education and related services.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the areas of signature of agreement or disagreement with rationale for disagreement. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding the provision of evaluation reports to parents for students classified as eligible for speech and language services.

### **Area of Need:**

**Provision of Evaluation Reports to Parents-** During the on-site monitoring visit, record review indicated that speech and language evaluation reports are not consistently provided to the parents at least ten days prior to an eligibility meeting for students who may be eligible for speech and language services.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure that evaluation reports are provided to parents at least ten days prior to eligibility meetings. Implementation of these activities will ensure the parent is provided sufficient time to review the results of the evaluation prior to the meeting. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of conducting IEP meetings, implementation dates, goals and objectives related to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, annual reviews conducted by June 30<sup>th</sup> for preschool age students in the last year of the preschool program and required components of the special education and related services IEP.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of components of the speech and language IEP. **The projected timelines in the improvement plan must be revised to reflect more timely correction of the noncompliance.**

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 preschool general education access, individual decision making and continuum.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of general education access for students ages 6 to 21, continuum, individual decision making, documentation regarding least restrictive environment and supplementary aids

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and services. The barrier identified by the district was a lack of knowledge regarding appropriate supplementary aids and services that would allow a student to be included in the general education classroom. **The district submitted an improvement plan to address the concern regarding supplementary aids and services; however, it is insufficient because it does not address all of the barriers identified in the self-assessment and does not include an oversight mechanism to ensure continued compliance. The plan must be revised to reflect these components.**

The district also identified a concern in the area of notification and participation in non-academic and extracurricular activities for students educated outside of the district. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of concern.

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

### **Section X: Transition to Post-School**

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

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding age 14 transition service needs.

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

**Student Interest and Preferences** - During the on-site monitoring visit, record review indicated that student interests and preferences are not identified and documented in the statement of transition service needs for students age 14 and older.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the student's individual interests and preferences are obtained and documented in the IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure the student has input into the long range plan for his or her future. The plan must include in-service training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.**

**Courses of Study** - During the on-site monitoring visit, record review indicated that courses of study are not identified and documented in the statement of transition service needs for students age 14 and older.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include activities to ensure the courses of study are aligned with student's interests and preferences. The plan must include in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation**

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### **Section X: Transition to Preschool**

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

During self-assessment, the district accurately identified compliance in the areas of participation in preschool transition planning conferences and implementing programs for preschoolers by age 3.

No 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 procedural safeguards, notification of removal, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational setting and manifestation determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of behavior intervention plans and oversight of strategies implemented to modify student behavior. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks sufficient activities, in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the district's procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.**

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

### **Section XIII: Graduation**

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

The Upper Deerfield Township School District does not serve high school students.



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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Upper Deerfield Township School District on May 6, 10 and 11, 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 the comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan, that with some revision, will bring about systemic change.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their opinion regarding many of the district's programs and services. Extended school year is provided; however, some parents stated that the program did not address students' academic needs. Students have current IEPs and parents indicated that their children were receiving the services identified in the IEP during the school year. Parents expressed concern regarding a lack of oversight of behavior intervention plans. The district identified this area of concern in the self-assessment. Parents also indicated that a range of services are available in the district; however, some indicated that there is a need to conduct staff training in the area of teaching students with dyslexia.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during the self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included **Reevaluation, Statewide Assessment, 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, dissemination of IDEA information, length of school year, facilities, certification, transfer students, related services, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, meetings, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, notice of meetings for students eligible for special education and related services, referral process, direct parent and staff referrals, summer referrals, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and written reports for students eligible for special education and related services, functional assessments for students eligible for speech and language services, eligibility meetings, participants, criteria, statement of eligibility, the provision of evaluation reports to parents for students classified as eligible for special education and related services, IEP meetings, implementation dates, goals and objectives, Core Curriculum Content Standards, annual review timelines, 90-day timelines, annual reviews conducted by June 30<sup>th</sup> for preschool age students in the last year of the preschool program, required components of the special education and related services IEP, preschool age general education access, individual decision making and continuum, preschool transition planning conference, implementing preschool disabled programs by age 3, discipline procedural safeguards, notification of removal, suspension tracking, interim alternative assessment and manifestation determination.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding pre-referral interventions, written reports for students eligible for speech and language services, signature of agreement or disagreement with rationale for disagreement, components of the speech and language IEP, general education access, continuum, and individual decision making for students ages 6 to 21, documentation of decisions regarding least restrictive environment, supplementary aids and services, notification

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and participation in extracurricular activities of students placed in out-of-district programs, behavior intervention plans and oversight of strategies implemented to modify behavior.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, notice in native language, notice of meetings for students eligible for speech and language services, child find activities, health summary, vision and hearing screening, provision of evaluation reports to parents of students eligible for speech and language services, student interests and preferences and documentation of courses of study for students age 14 and older.

Within 45 days of receipt of the monitoring report, the Upper Deerfield Township School District will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address those areas that require revisions.