

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

**District:** Warren Hills Regional School District

**County:** Warren

**Monitoring Dates:** March 18,19 and 20,2002

**Monitoring Team:** Zola Mills, Jennifer DeSaye, Gladys Miller

### **Background Information:**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Warren Hills Regional School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Warren Hills Regional 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 Warren Hills Regional 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 school on March 11, 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 numerous programs such as their commitment to promoting student self-advocacy at both the IEP meetings and in the classroom from the beginning of their middle school years through high school graduation; the district's

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participation in the Inclusion Institute and their extensive in-class support programs across curricula areas; the 'Best Buddies' program where students with cognitive impairments are paired with a general education student to establish friendships and acceptance; the 'School Based' program (a joint grant program with Warren County Family Guidance) located on the high school campus which offers counseling, anger management, home work assistance and recreational activities; their commitment to technology as evidenced by the computers in classrooms, computer labs and the mobile computer labs in each building; and the provision of a 'student data book' to general education teachers containing all of the special requirements of the special education students in their classes.

The district is further commended for its "Library Showcase", a curricular enrichment center that offers exhibits, dramatic presentations, and other materials to complement the district's curricular objectives and the core content curriculum standards. The library also contains an audio listening center for books on tape and a media room where individual students and/or classes may view supplemental educational programs available from library resources, Channel One tapings and Cable in the Classroom.

During the on-site monitoring visit, a review of records and interviews with parents and staff indicated improvement plan activities had been implemented prior to the on-site visit. As a result, correction of those areas identified during the self-assessment process had already occurred.

### **I. General Provisions**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of dissemination of IDEA information.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns in the areas of policies and procedures and professional/parent development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

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 length of school day/year, facilities and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, related services and transfer students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these concerns.

No additional areas of need were 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, notices of meetings, written notice and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, meetings and native language. 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.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas Child Find and direct referrals by parents/staff.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the areas of the referral process, health summaries and hearing/vision screenings, summer referrals and identification meeting timelines/participants. 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.

### **V. Evaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations and acceptance or rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, and bilingual evaluations. 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.

### **VI. Reevaluation**

#### **Summary of Finding:**

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

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines. 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 process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, documentation of eligibility and copy of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process the district identified concerns regarding a specific learning disability formula. 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.

### **VIII. IEP**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of implementation dates, teacher knowledge/access to the IEP and meeting ninety-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, considerations and required statements, alignment of goals and objectives to core curriculum content standards (CCCS), age of majority and annual review timelines. 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.

### **IX. LRE**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, Oberti factors and considerations and documentation, supplementary aids/services, regular education access, nonacademic/extracurricular participation and continuum. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

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### **X. Transition**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of invitations to transition meeting to students/agencies, agency involvement age fourteen and sixteen transition service needs, courses 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 monitoring visit.

### **XI. Discipline**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, behavioral intervention plans, functional behavior assessments, manifestation determination and interim alternative education setting (IAES). The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

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

### **XII. Statewide Assessment**

#### **Summary of findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of approved accommodations/modifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns with participation, IEP documentation and alternate 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 monitoring visit.

### **XIII. Graduation**

#### **Summary of findings:**

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of IEP requirements and diploma.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of participation of out-of-district students. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area of need.

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During the on-site visit an additional area of need was identified regarding the provision of written notice of graduation. The district took immediate action to correct this area of need by adopting the notice form developed by the Office of Special Education Programs and by implementing a procedure to ensure graduates receive the notice prior to graduation.

### **IV. Programs and Services**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range/waivers and group sizes for speech.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size/waivers and home instruction. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. The district further identified concerns regarding insufficient staff and the negative impact it has on case management time, crisis management and the provision of group and individual counseling services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and the participation of fiscal administrators 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 monitoring visit.

### **XV. Student Records**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets and maintenance.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of parent/adult student access and destruction of records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need.

During the on-site visit an additional area of need was identified regarding documentation of alternate location of student records.

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

**Documentation of Locations** – During the on-site, a review of central files indicated that the location of other records maintained by the district is not identified.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the central files identify the location of other records maintained by the district.**

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Warren Hills Regional School District on March 18, 19 and 20, 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 exceptionally comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of this review the district was able to identify all but two areas of need and develop and implement an improvement plan that resulted in the correction of all identified areas prior to the on-site visit. 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. Parents indicated the communication between home and school was excellent, that they felt they were equal members of the IEP team, that student involvement in self-advocacy and the IEP process was wonderful as were transition services. They praised the child study team's patience and professionalism.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included dissemination of IDEA information, length of school year, facilities, certifications, obtaining consent, notices of meetings, written notice, independent evaluations, Child Find, direct referrals by parent/staff, multi-disciplinary, acceptance/rejection of reports, planning meetings, participants at planning meetings, eligibility meetings and participants, documentation of eligibility, copies of evaluation reports to parents, implementation dates, ninety day timelines, teacher knowledge/access, statewide assessment accommodations/modifications, IEP graduation requirements, diploma, age range/waiver, group sizes for speech therapy, access sheets and maintenance of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, professional/parent development, extended school year, provision of related services, transfer students, surrogate parents, holding of meetings, native language, referral processes, summer referrals, vision and hearing screenings, participants and timelines for identification meeting, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation timelines, criteria, IEP participants, considerations/required statements, goals and objectives aligned with core curriculum content standards, age of majority, and annual review, individualized decision making, Oberti factors, considerations and documentation, supplementary aids and services, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum, student agency invitation, agency involvement in transition, age fourteen and sixteen transition service needs, courses, preferences and interests, discipline procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, BIP/FBA, manifestation determination, Interim Alternative Educational Setting, participation in statewide assessment, IEP documentation, alternate assessment, graduation IEP requirements, diploma, class size/waiver, home instruction, parent/adult student access, and destruction of student records.

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The on-site visit identified two additional areas of need regarding written notice of graduation and documentation of alternate locations of student records.

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 two areas of need identified during the on-site visit.