

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

**District:** Washington Township (Green Bank) School District      **County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** December 13 - 14, 2004 & March 11, 2005

**Monitoring Team:** Jane Marano

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

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Washington 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 Washington Township 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 permit the district the opportunity to identify areas of strength and promising practices, as well as areas needing improvement and areas that may be noncompliant with state and federal requirements. The Washington 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 Green Bank Elementary School on the evening of November 18, 2004. Two parents and two staff members were in attendance. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the subsequent monitoring activities.

During the on-site visit, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) 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 administrator, district superintendent/building principal, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

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

The Washington Township School District is a kindergarten through eighth grade school district, with a population of 134 students in one school. Of those 134 students, 23 are classified as eligible for special education and related services and 11 are classified as eligible for speech/language services. The district has a classification rate of 15.6%

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(excluding speech-language services) which is slightly above the state average of 14.6%. Review of data indicates that in 2002 the district had a classification rate of 21.1% compared to the state rate of 13.9% and in 2003 the district had a rate of 22.7% compared to the state rate of 14.3%. In response to these data, the district identified an area of need regarding lack of understanding of the criteria for eligibility, especially in the area of specific learning disability. The district is commended for taking immediate action to reduce the classification rate through the self-assessment process.

A positive trend was noted in the data regarding the number of students with disabilities educated in general education classes over the last three years. Review of the data indicates that during the 2004-2005 school year, 54.5% of students eligible for special education were educated in general education classes for more than 80% of the day with supports. This is an increase of 13.5% from the 2003-2004 school year. In addition, the district's rate of 54.5% exceeded the state average of 41.9% for that year. The district has increased the number of classroom assistants and has expanded the basic skills program to provide more services in general education.

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

**General Provisions, Location, Referral and Identification (LRI), Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation (K-8 district), 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.

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

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

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, frequency, location and duration of related services, goals and objectives for related services, and maintenance of hearing aids. During the on-site visit, the district was able to demonstrate that it has begun to appropriately implement the improvement plan 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 indicated compliance in the areas of procedures for location and training surrogate parents, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/reevaluation/release of student records, provision/content of notice of a meeting, content of written notice, conducting required meetings, provision of interpreters at meetings, conducting independent evaluations, and native language.

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of provision of written notice. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a sufficient administrative oversight component for students eligible for special education and related services as well as for students eligible for speech and language services to ensure activities bring about corrective action. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

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

### **Section VI: Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of reevaluation planning meetings/participants, and reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of student's last year in preschool.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of maintaining 3-year timelines. **The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks a sufficient administrative oversight component for students eligible for special education and related services as well as for students eligible for speech and language services to ensure activities bring about corrective action. The plan must be revised to include this component.**

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

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment, the district indicated compliance in the areas of eligibility meetings and participants, criteria for determining eligibility for speech and language services, and signature of agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria for determining eligibility for special education and related services, and provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 Washington Township (Green Bank) School District on December 13 – 14, 2004 and March 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 Washington Township School District is commended for the exceptionally comprehensive review conducted as part of the self-assessment activities. As a result of that review, the district was able to identify virtually all areas of need and to develop an improvement plan that, with minor revision, will bring about systemic change. Additionally, the district is 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 concerns regarding communication with the child study team (the school district contracts for child study team services from a local education agency in Salem County), and transition planning for students who are 14 years old.

A review of data indicated that, as part of the self-assessment process, the district identified the high rate of students requiring special education, specifically in the area of specific learning disability, as an area of need. The district is commended for taking immediate action to reduce the classification rate through a review of procedures. As a result, the classification rate dropped below the state average. The district has increased the number of classified students placed in general education settings over the last few years, which is reflective of the district's commitment to educating students with disabilities with their peers.

**General Provisions, Location, Referral and Identification (LRI), Protection in Evaluation and Evaluation Procedures, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Transition, Discipline, Statewide Assessment, Graduation (K-8 district), Programs and Services, and Student Records** were areas demonstrating compliance with all standards.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, procedures for location and training surrogate parents, consent for initial evaluation/initial implementation of IEP/reevaluation/release of student records, provision/content of notice of a meeting, content of written notice, conducting required meetings, provision of interpreters at meetings, conducting independent evaluations, native language, reevaluation planning meetings/participants, reevaluations completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of student's last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria for determining eligibility for speech and language services, and signature of agreement/disagreement with eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, frequency, location and duration of related services, goals and objectives for related services, maintenance of hearing aides, provision of written notice, maintaining three year timelines, criteria for determining eligibility for special education and related services, and provision of evaluation reports to parents 10 days prior to the eligibility meeting.

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

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