

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

**District:** West Deptford School District

**County:** Gloucester County

**Monitoring Dates:** November 18, 19, 20, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Caryl Carthew, Patricia Fair, Julia Harmelin

***Background Information:***

During the 2001–2002 school year, the West Deptford School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the West Deptford 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 West Deptford 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 West Deptford Middle School on November 14, 2002. 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, 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, speech therapists and child study team members.

**District Strengths:**

The district provides an extensive special education program, servicing students with varying degrees of disabilities. The district is commended for its commitment to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities within the general education setting. It was

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apparent that this level of commitment extends from the highest levels of administrators to the instructional and support staff.

The district also provides a number of supportive programs including a student mentoring program at the middle and high school levels, an extensive parent volunteer program, a summer math camp for all district fourth-grade students, literacy tutorials during the summer months, and teacher support groups at the high school level.

The district operates the Power School Program, which allows parents to electronically access information regarding student performance. In addition, parents and teachers are able to communicate through e-mail. This program has enhanced parent and teacher communication. The district also operates the Renaissance Program, which acknowledges good attendance, academic achievement, and exemplary behavior for all students. In addition, the district operates School Empowerment Team which reinforces positive behavior at the high school level.

The district received a grant to operate the Classroom Assistance Program (CAP). Each classroom in the district, Grades kindergarten through five, has a specially trained aide for a portion of each school day. These classroom aides provide assistance in math, reading, and writing activities.

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

**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 I: General Provisions***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional development. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, related services (except for speech therapy), length of school day and year, transfer students, and certification.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of speech therapy and facilities. The district's improvement plan is sufficient in the areas of

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speech therapy and facilities. The district further identified concerns in the area of transfer students classified eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of surrogate parents, written notice for students classified eligible for special education and related services, native language, and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of consent, notice of a meeting, meetings, and written notice for students classified eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of child find ages 3-21, direct parent referrals, direct staff referrals, and summer referrals.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of referral process, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for preschool students, and identification meeting timelines. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these issues.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding health summary and vision and hearing screenings for school-aged children and identification meeting participants.

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

**Health Summary/Vision and Hearing Screenings** - During the on-site monitoring visit it was determined through record review and interviews that a health summary and vision and hearing screenings are not completed for every student referred for an evaluation.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that a health summary and vision and hearing screenings are completed for every student referred for special education and related**

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**services. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Identification Meeting Participants** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education teachers and all members of the Child Study Team do not consistently participate in identification meetings.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers and Child Study Team members consistently participate in identification meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, written reports, and acceptance and rejection of written reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of bilingual evaluations, documentation of educational impact for students classified eligible for speech and language services, and functional assessments for students classified eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding functional assessments for students classified eligible for special education and related services.

**Area of Need:**

**Functional Assessments** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that all components of a functional assessment are not completed for every student evaluated for special education and related services. Specifically, parent interviews are not consistently completed if the social worker is not involved in the evaluation process.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that functional assessments include all required components. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **Section V:   Reevaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines for students classified eligible for special education and related services, planning meetings, participants, and meetings for students turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of timelines for students classified eligible for speech and language services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of timelines, written notice, implementation dates, considerations and required statements, goals and objectives related to the Core Content Curriculum Standards, age of majority, and teacher knowledge and access.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of notice of a meeting, participation of vocational personnel, and the provision of IEPs to parents prior to implementation. 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 at IEP meetings.

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

**Participants** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and interviews that regular education teachers do not participate in IEP meetings for students eligible for speech and language services.

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- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that regular education teachers consistently participate in IEP meetings for students eligible for speech and language services. The 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 themselves compliant in the areas of individualized decision-making, OBERTI, considerations and documentation, and supplemental aids and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, and continuum of services. The district identified the need for intensive staff development, multi-level materials, and a more cost effective way to train instructional aides who provide services within the general education setting. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in all preschool indicators.

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

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of student and agency invitation, age 14 transition service needs, courses of study, preferences and interests, and age 16 needed transition services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of agency involvement and monitoring of implementation of services. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, record review and staff interviews indicated the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of these areas.

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

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### **Section X: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans/functional behavioral analyses, manifestation determinations, and interim alternate educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of documentation to case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, record review and staff interviews indicated the district has implemented activities that have resulted in the correction of 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 themselves compliant in the areas of parent and adult student access, and maintenance.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of destruction of student records. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of locations of other records.

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

**Documentation of Location of Other Records** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review and staff interviews that the central files do not document the location of other files maintained by the district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that central files document the location of other files maintained by the district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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### **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the West Deptford School District on November 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 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. Parents expressed their satisfaction with inclusive programs, transition services, preschool services, and related services. A concern was raised regarding the level of inclusion services at the elementary level.

Standards identified as compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included statewide assessment, graduation, and programs and services.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, the provision of speech therapy, transfer students classified as eligible for speech and language services, facilities, consent for reevaluation, notice of a meeting, written notice for students classified as eligible for speech and language services, referral process, health summary and vision and hearing screenings for preschool students, identification meeting timelines, bilingual evaluations for students classified eligible for speech and language services, functional assessments for students classified eligible for speech and language services, reevaluation timelines for students classified eligible for speech and language services, the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents, participation of vocational personnel, notice of an IEP meeting, the provision of copies of IEPs provided to parents prior to implementation, regular education access, nonacademic and extracurricular participation, continuum of services, agency involvement, monitoring of implementation by outside agencies, documentation of discipline to case manager, and destruction of student records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding health summary and vision and hearing screenings for school-aged children, identification meeting participants, functional assessments for students eligible for special education and related services, participation of regular education teachers at IEP meetings for students eligible for speech and language services, and documentation of location of other records.

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