

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

**District:** Wharton Borough School District

**County:** Morris

**Monitoring Dates:** June 1, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Jenifer Spear and Zola Mills

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

During the 2002–2003 school year, the **Wharton Borough School District** conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the **Wharton Borough 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 **Wharton Borough 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.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Alfred C. MacKinnon Middle School on June 3, 2004.

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 is commended for providing pre-school for all four year old students. All pre-school disabled students that attend the pre-school disabled program are offered the opportunity to attend a regular education pre-school setting in the afternoon. This allows previously self-contained pre-school disabled students to be educated in a less restrictive environment by offering general education opportunities with their non-disabled peers.

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The district is commended for providing a Wilson Reading program to all students. This program is infused into the curricular in kindergarten through fifth grade. In addition, the Wilson reading instructors provide pull out instruction to those students who require more intense remediation.

### **Data Summary:**

Based on a review of the data, the district has successfully placed nearly all four year old pre-school disabled students within the district's general education pre-school programs. However, the district has placed nearly all three year old pre-school students in restrictive settings such as private special education schools or in the pre-school disabled program. To address this issue the district plans to continue the expansion of the general education pre-school program so that these students can be educated with their non-disabled peers within the district.

The district reported that 39.4% of students in 2002 and 34.4% of students in 2001 were educated with general education students more than 80% of the day. Since these percentages are below the state average, the district has developed a plan in Part I, Goal 1, Indicator 2 to address this area of need. Activities such as staff development in the areas of instructional adaptations and modifications, coping with student behavior, inclusion and least restrictive environment will be provided to staff members in addition to conducting a review of the placement of special education students currently educated with general education students less than 40% of the day.

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

**Location, Referral and Identification, Re-evaluation, Statewide Assessments, 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 I: General Provisions***

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

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of parent training. Although the district did not identify this as an area of need in Part II, it was identified in Part I, Goal 3, Indicator 1. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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 themselves compliant in the areas of extended school year, frequency, duration and location of related services, length of school day and year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of documentation of the provision of related services and provision of adapted physical education. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address 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 accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of consent, notices of meetings, meetings, written notice, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parent selection and training and notices in native language. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### **Section V: Evaluation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, components of written reports and bilingual evaluations.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding acceptance and rejection of reports.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Acceptance and Rejection of Reports** - During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review that evaluation reports from outside agencies are neither accepted nor rejected by the child study team.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that child study team members accept or reject reports or parts of reports submitted by outside agencies. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are aware of any report or part of a report that was rejected by the child study team and the reason(s) why it was**

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

**Section VII: Eligibility**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings, participants, criteria, signatures of agreement or disagreement and documentation of eligibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concern in the area of provision of a copy 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 considerations, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, annual review timelines and teacher access and responsibility.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of appropriate participants at meetings, reconvening meetings for appropriate participants, signatures of participants at IEP meetings, ninety day timelines and provision of a copy of IEP to parents prior to implementation, provision of services prior to IEP implementation, required statements, goals and objectives aligned to the core curriculum content standards and IEP revisions. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of documentation of least restrictive environment.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of continuum of programs for in-class-support classes due to lack of staff, out-of-district student knowledge of extracurricular and nonacademic activities and decision making process due to lack of staff to expand existing programs. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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### Section X: Transition to Pre-School

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of pre-school transition planning conference and implementation of IEPs by age three for students entering from Early Intervention. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

### Section X: Transition to Post School

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

Wharton Borough School District is a K-8 district. The district did not realize this section was applicable and therefore did not complete it.

An area of need was identified during the on-site monitoring visit regarding age fourteen transition service needs.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Age Fourteen Transition Service Needs** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that the district is not developing transition plans for students who will turn age fourteen during the period of time that the IEP will be in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that age fourteen transition service needs are considered and documented in the IEP for those students who are or will be fourteen during the period the IEP will be in effect. Implementation of the activities will ensure appropriate transition plans are developed based on the student's interests and preferences as well as on the student's strengths and are aligned to the student's post secondary outcomes. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### Section XI: Discipline

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of suspension tracking, behavior intervention plans, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, interim alternate educational settings and procedural safeguards

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During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of documentation to case manager. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

### **Section XIII: Graduation Requirements**

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

Wharton Borough School District is a K-8 district, therefore written notice of graduation and out-of-district participation is not applicable.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding graduation requirements at age fourteen.

#### **Area(s) of Need:**

**Graduation Requirements at Age Fourteen** – During the on-site monitoring, it was determined through record review and interviews that the district is not including graduation requirements in the IEPs of those students who will turn age fourteen during the period of time that the IEP will be in effect.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that graduation requirements are documented in the IEP for those students who are or will be fourteen during the period the IEP will be in effect. Implementation of the activities will ensure that students are aware of the courses, credit hours, attendance requirements and statewide assessments required for graduation. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

### **Section XIV: Programs and Services**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age ranges, group sizes for speech, home instruction and consultation time.

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

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

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## **Summary**

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Wharton Borough School District on June 1, 2004. 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 that review the district was able to identify nearly all areas of need and develop an improvement plan that will bring about systemic change. The district is further commended for the many areas determined by the district and verified by the Office of Special Education Programs as compliant with federal and state statutes and regulations.

The district is commended for its creation of pre-school opportunities for four year old students. Activities have been designed to increase the number of special education students educated in regular education settings for more than 80% of the school day.

At a focus group meeting held during the on-site monitoring visit, many parents expressed their satisfaction with the district's programs and services. Although all parents indicated that they are very involved in the IEP process, some parents indicated that they are not made aware of the services the district could be providing to their children.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included, policies and procedures, staff training, dissemination of IDEA information, extended school year, documentation of frequency, duration, and location of related services, length of school day and year, transfer procedures, facilities, certifications, consent, notices of meetings, meetings, written notice, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, Child Find 3-21, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summary, vision and hearing screening, identification meetings, timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary assessments, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports, bilingual evaluations, reevaluation planning meetings and participants, reevaluations completed by June 30 of students last year in preschool, eligibility meetings and participants, criteria, signatures of agreement and disagreement, documentation of eligibility considerations, present levels of educational performance, age of majority, annual review timelines, teacher access and responsibility, LRE documentation, suspension tracking, behavior improvement plan, functional behavior assessment, manifestation determination, procedural safeguards, interim alternate educational setting, alternate proficiency assessment, approved accommodations and modifications for statewide assessments, participation in statewide assessments, IEP documentation, age range, group sizes, home instruction, consultation time, access to records, access sheets, maintenance and destruction and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding parent training, documentation of the provision of related services, provision of adapted physical education, surrogate parent selection and training, notices in native language, provision of copy of evaluation reports to parents, appropriate participants at IEP meetings, reconvening meetings for appropriate participants, signatures of IEP participants, ninety day timelines, provision of IEP to parents prior to implementation, provision of services prior to IEP implementation, required statements, goals and objectives aligned to core curriculum content standards, IEP revisions, continuum of

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programs for in-class-support classes, student knowledge of extracurricular activities and nonacademic activities, decision making process, pre-school transition planning conference, implementation of IEPs for students age three from EIP, documentation to case manager and class sizes.

The on-site monitoring visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding acceptance and rejection of reports, age fourteen transition service needs and graduation requirements at age fourteen.

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