

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

**Charter school:** Hope Academy Charter School      **County:** Monmouth

**Monitoring Dates:** November 9, 2004

**Monitoring Team:** Vanessa Leonard

***Background Information:***

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Hope Academy Charter School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Hope Academy Charter School 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 Hope Academy Charter School 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 Hope Academy Charter School, on November 4th. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site visit, the NJDOE team reviewed charter school documents, including the charter school 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 charter school's special education administrators, building principals, general education and special education teachers, speech therapist and child study team members.

**Charter School Strengths:**

The charter school is commended for providing Saturday School. Saturday School participants meet once a month for enrichment and extended supplemental academic work. Special activities are conducted such as, studying artists from various genres, square dancing, the well digging project and gymnasium geography.

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The charter school provides a morning meeting for the entire school called Community Circle. Community Circle offers students a time to meet for opening ceremonies as well as to reflect on their role in the community of learners.

The charter school also participates in the "Adopt a Block" program. "Adopt a Block" is a city wide, city council sponsored, community service program. Hope Academy Charter School has adopted the block surrounding the school to clean and maintain. Students learn about the importance of being a part of their community through service.

### **Data Summary:**

In 2003, the Hope Academy Charter School had 119 students enrolled, 16 of whom received special education and related services. The charter school had a classification rate of 13.45% for 2003. In 2003, the school increased their efforts to include students with disabilities in general education and the rate of students placed in the general education setting for more than 80% of the school day went from 0% to 48%.

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

**General Provisions, Revaluation, and Statewide Assessment** were determined to be areas of compliance by the charter school 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 charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of provision of programs, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities and certifications.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding goals and objectives for related services.

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

**Goals and Objectives for Related Services** - During the on-site monitoring visit, it was determined through record review that IEPs do not consistently include goals and objectives for students requiring counseling and speech therapy as a related service.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure goals and objectives for all related services are developed and included in IEPs for all students who receive these services. Implementation of these activities will ensure that all members of the IEP team have an opportunity for input in establishing goals and objectives which will be relevant to students' needs in the classroom and used to determine progress. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of consent and content/provision of notice of meetings and written notice.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

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

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines and participants.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding child find.

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

**Child Find** – During the on-site monitoring it was determined through interviews with the co-directors that charter school personnel were not aware of their obligation to conduct child find activities within the school.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that it conducts Child Find activities to locate, refer and identify students within the charter school who may require special education services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the plan.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated and acceptance/rejection of reports.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of bilingual evaluations. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the charter school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students with specific learning disabilities and provision of evaluation reports to parents.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding signatures of agreement/disagreement with rationale.

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

**Signatures of Agreement/Disagreement** – During the onsite monitoring, record review indicated that the IEP team does not express assenting or dissenting opinions regarding eligibility determinations for students eligible for special education or for students eligible for speech and language services. As a result teachers are not afforded the opportunity to express dissenting opinions and parents are not made aware of this point of view regarding eligibility determinations.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities that will ensure that personnel have an opportunity to state in writing whether they agree or disagree with the eligibility determinations. Further, the charter school will document the rationale for any disagreement. Implementation of these activities will ensure parents are fully informed of any differing opinions regarding these eligibility determinations. The improvement plan must include and administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of these activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of meeting participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parent, 90 day timelines and teacher access.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of teacher responsibility. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, staff interviews indicated that the charter school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding IEP required statements.

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### **Area of Need:**

**IEP Required Statements for Students Eligible for Speech-Language Services –** During the on-site monitoring, it was determined during the record review that required statements were inconsistently written or written incorrectly.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure that all required statements are addressed in the student’s IEP. For students eligible for speech and language services, the state IEP form for students eligible for speech-language services may be used as a model to ensure that all required statements are addressed in the student’s IEP. Implementation of these activities will ensure that the IEP team members will have the opportunity to document the decision making process that led to the proposed programs and services. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

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

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of general education access, notification/participation of out-of-district students for nonacademic/extracurricular activities and continuum of programs.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding the decision making process/LRE documentation and considerations of supplementary aids and services.

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

**Decision Making Process/LRE Documentation –** During the on-site monitoring, interviews and record review indicated that the IEP team did not consistently document the required discussions when considering the least restrictive environment. Although the charter school is using the state IEP format, team members are either not consistently responding to the required questions or are providing responses that are not relevant to the questions.

- **The charter school will revise the improvement plan to include activities to ensure the IEP specifies: the consideration of appropriate supplementary aids and services and program modification; the explanation why the supplementary aids and services and program modification are not appropriate and the documentation of the comparison of benefits in each setting. Implementation of these activities will ensure the team had documented the decision-making process and more clearly defined the rationale for specific placement. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the activities.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of preferences and interests.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of Transition Service Needs. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area.

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

**Section X: Transition to Preschool**

As Hope Academy Charter School is a K-8 school, there are no findings in this area.

**Section XI: Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of interim alternative educational settings and procedural safeguards.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans and manifestation determination meetings. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

**Section XIII: Graduation**

No findings could be made in the area of graduation. Hope Academy Charter School is a K-8 school; to date an annual review has not taken place for a student age 14 or older.

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of age range waivers, group sizes for related services, consultation time and class descriptions.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the areas of class size and home instruction. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas.

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

**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment, the charter school accurately identified compliance in the areas of access/requests, access sheets, maintenance and destruction of records and documentation of other locations.

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified concerns in the area of staff responsibility. The charter school's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the charter school has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

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### Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted at the **Hope Academy Charter School** on **November 9, 2004**. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the charter school's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, parents expressed their satisfaction with many of the charter school's programs and services. Five parents attended the focus group meeting. All parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of education their children are receiving. Parents also agreed that they appreciate the communication between school and home regarding the needs of their children. Parents appreciate that the charter school provides a family atmosphere which encourages them to participate in their child's education via parent training sessions. One parent stated that discipline was an issue at the charter school. The charter school also found this to be an area of need and has written an improvement plan to address this area.

The charter school indicated compliance in the following areas during self-assessment and were verified during the on-site monitoring visit included provision of programs, related services, length of school day/year, transfer students, facilities, certifications, consent, content/provision of notice of meetings, written notice, referral process, pre-referral interventions, direct referrals, health summaries, vision/hearing screenings, identification meeting timelines, identification meeting participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, written reports signed/dated, acceptance/rejection of reports, meeting participants, criteria, statement of eligibility for students with specific learning disabilities, provision of evaluation reports to parents, meeting participants, present levels of educational performance, goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parent, 90 day timelines, teacher access, general education access, notification/participation of out-of-district students for nonacademic/extracurricular activities, continuum of programs, preferences/interests, interim alternative educational settings, procedural safeguards, age range/waivers, group sizes for related services, consultation time, class descriptions, access/request, access sheets, maintenance/destruction of records and documentation of other locations

During the self-assessment process, the charter school identified areas of need surrogate parents, notices in native language, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, bilingual evaluations, teacher responsibility, IEP required statements for students eligible for speech-language services, transition service needs, documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determination meetings, class size, home instruction and staff responsibility.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding goals and objectives for related services, child find activities, signatures of agreement/disagreement with rationale, decision making process/LRE documentation and considerations of supplementary aids and services,

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