

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

Receiving School: Horizon School **County:** Essex

Monitoring Dates: April 18-19, 2005

Monitoring Team: Diane Mari, Ann Marie Bruder, Gregory Margolis, Elaine Lerner

Background Information:

During the 2003–2004 school year, the Horizon School conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Horizon School 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 development and implementation of policies and procedures resulting in procedural compliance; and
- The organization and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.

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 Horizon School developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) 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.

During the monitoring process, the monitoring team reviewed receiving school documents such as policies and procedures, student records from sending districts, lesson plans, services as indicated in IEPs, staff evaluations, student count information, master student lists, class lists, schedules of students/ teachers/related service personnel, and other relevant information. Interviews were conducted with the receiving school's special education administrators, building principals, special education teachers, parents and related service personnel.

School Strengths:

The Horizon School is commended for fostering relationships with local public and non-public schools creating opportunities for enrolled students to interact with non-disabled peers on a regular basis during the school day. The Horizon School offers a variety of therapies within the community including Hippotherapy at a West Orange facility and aquatic therapy at a facility located in East Hanover. The Horizon School students also operate their own school store.

The Horizon School has a very active parent group. This group has provided the school with a well-equipped and fully accessible playground that can be used for both daily instruction and recreational activities. The Horizon School also provides additional services as part of their program. They include a partnership with Lens Crafters which allows for the families to receive free eyeglasses, as needed.

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Section I: General Provisions

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding staff development, annual reports, amendments and programs provided in nonsectarian settings.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding policies and procedures. The school submitted policies and procedures to the monitoring team. These submitted policies and procedures will be reviewed by the Essex County Office of Education and any required revisions will be communicated through that office.

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 Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, approval of extended school year program and program open to observation by LEA and DOE.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding maintenance of hearing aids and frequency and duration of related services. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the area of maintenance of hearing aids. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school has appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in this area. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of frequency and duration of related services because it lacks procedures for communicating to sending districts regarding discrepancies that appear in IEP. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure that staff are familiar with and implement the procedures in a consistent manner. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding provision of services and related services as per IEP and evaluation without referral.

Areas of Need:

Provision of Services as per IEP- During the on-site visit a review of records determined that the school routinely makes programmatic changes to student schedules and subjects. A review of documents indicated that while the school communicates to parents regarding changes to student programs, these changes are made without prior discussion at an IEP meeting. For example, through record reviews it was determined that the school offered music group in place of the related service of speech therapy.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that any proposed changes to IEPs will be directed to the sending**

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district for review and discussion by an appropriately configured IEP team. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.

Provision of Related Services- During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school does not provide occupational therapy or speech therapy as indicated in IEPs due to insufficient employment of related services staff

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that students receive related services as indicated in IEPs. The plan must address how the districts will be notified if the school is unable to provide related services as specified in IEP due to staff vacancies. The plan must further address how the districts will be notified that the required related services have not been provided and the arrangements made to provide compensatory services.**

Evaluation for Related Services Without Referral- During the on-visit, through record reviews it was determined that the school's related services staff members routinely perform initial evaluations and reevaluations and make recommendations for the provision of related services prior to contacting the resident district.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when the school believes that a student requires an evaluation to initiate, terminate or modify related services, a referral must be made to the child study team of the sending district. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Assistive Technology Evaluations Without Referral- During the on-site visit, through record reviews and staff interviews it was determined that when staff members feel that a student would benefit from assistive technology, the school's staff member, who specializes in augmentative communication, conducts the evaluation prior to contacting the sending district and makes recommendations for assistive technology devices.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when the school believes that a student requires an evaluation to initiate, terminate or modify assistive technology services, a referral must be made to the child study team of the sending district. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure constitute implementation of the procedures.**

Section III: Staff Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding appropriate supervision of physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office and having an approved professional development plan.

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During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding criminal history verification. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures and an administrative oversight component to ensure that documentation for criminal history verification is consistently followed up by the school. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding certified licensed staff.

Area of Need:

Certified/licensed Staff- During the on-site visit, during staff interviews and record reviews, it was determined that the physical education teacher is working under a substitute certificate and the assignment has exceeded the 20 day maximum requirement. In addition, the school has not obtained prior written approval from the county office of education for the COTA/job coach position. Staff members who are responsible for developing individualized behavior plans with the sending districts and implementing the plans do not hold New Jersey certification.

- **The school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to employ an appropriately certified teacher to provide students with the required minimum of 150 minutes of health, safety and physical education instruction each week. The plan must also ensure that all staff members are appropriately certified for the positions they hold. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

Section IV: Facility Requirements

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding programs provided in approved facilities and fire drills.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the areas regarding boiler inspections.

Area of Need:

Boiler Inspection- During the on-site visit, a review of documentation determined that the school did not have a record of the boiler inspection for the current year.

- **The school must immediately make arrangements for an inspection of the school's boiler with documentation of the inspection provided to the county office of education within 30 days of receipt of the report. In addition, the school must revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school conducts all required annual building inspections. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section V: Individualized Education Plan/Annual Review

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing and informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding IEP meeting conducted at least annually, communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components and inconsistency of related service information in initial IEPs. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because they lack a mechanism for tracking of IEP timelines to ensure that the school has a current IEP prior to service delivery. In addition, the school must revise its plan to include procedures for reviewing IEPs for missing components with appropriate follow up with sending districts. The plan must include staff training and an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures. In addition, the school's improvement plan identified timelines that have not been met. The school must revise its plan to include these components and must include new timelines for correction in these areas.**

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit in the area regarding the implementation of specialized instructional techniques.

Area of Need:

Specialized Instructional Techniques- During the on-site visit, through staff interviews and classroom observation it was determined that the school has one classroom that uses specialized instructional techniques that have not been discussed and documented in the IEP. Staff members indicated that the method of instruction utilized in that class is the Greenspan Method, a sensory input program that provides opportunities for students to learn through interactive play and relationships. During the on-site visit, several students in this classroom were observed without pants, shirts and/or shoes. While described by the teacher as a requirement of the Greenspan method, online research of the method did not describe this as an essential part of the program. In addition, the teacher of the program did not appear to have any materials to support this method of instruction and did not have any documentation of training in this method. According to the website, the Greenspan approach, or Floor Time, is an instructional strategy, not a comprehensive educational program as was reflected in this classroom. In addition, these techniques were not addressed in the IEPs of students placed in that classroom.

- **The school will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the school does not make unilateral decisions regarding the students' program. If the school staff believes that a change in the program is appropriate, they must contact the sending district to request an IEP meeting. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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Section VI: Discipline

Summary of Finding:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting and procedures for termination of student placement.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures, use of restraints, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process and staff training for procedures for behavioral intervention plans. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas regarding standard disciplinary procedures and removal of student pending mediation and due process. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the use of restraints and behavioral intervention plans because they lack staff training and administrative oversight component to ensure that behavior management plans are developed by an appropriately configured IEP team and that any discussion of the use of safety belts and other restraints are discussed in IEP meetings with their use documented in IEPs. In addition, the school's improvement plan identified timelines that have not been met. The school must be revise its plan to include these components and must include new timelines for correction.**

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

Section VII: Programs and Services

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, and collaboration for home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding teachers trained and instructing in CCCSs, dispensing medication, nursing services, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services and medical exams for sport teams. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas of need. During the on-site visit, a review of records determined that the school had appropriately implemented specific activities for correction in these areas.

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

Section VIII: Student Records

Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment, the Horizon School accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas regarding conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon

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termination, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified concerns in the areas regarding notation of decentralized records, mandated health records and access to records. The school's improvement plan is sufficient to address the areas of notation of decentralized records and mandated health records. **The school's improvement plan is insufficient to address the area of access to records because it lacks procedures to ensure that only certified staff members with educational responsibility have direct access to student records. During staff interviews, it was determined that the behavioral assistant and job coach who lack educational certification were given direct access to student records. The plan must be revised to include these components.**

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 Horizon School on April 18-19, 2005. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to verify the Horizon School's report of findings resulting from their self-assessment and to review the receiving school's improvement plan.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the Horizon School during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included staff development, annual reports, amendments, programs provided in nonsectarian settings, length of school day and year, services at no cost to parents, approval of extended school year program, program open to observation by LEA and DOE, appropriate supervision of physical therapy assistants (PTA) and certified occupational therapy assistants (COTA), private school dual employment, supervision of paraprofessionals, job descriptions of paraprofessionals maintained at county office, having an approved professional development plan, programs provided in approved facilities, fire drills, IEP conducted with required receiving school participants, IEP conducted with students age 14 and older, as appropriate, signatures of participants present on IEPs, IEP accessibility to teachers and providers, informing teachers and providers of IEP responsibilities, timely implementation of IEPs, observation of proposed placement, statewide testing, informing parents of progress toward goals and objectives removal of student pending mediation and due process, notification to sending districts regarding suspensions, removal of student to interim alternative educational setting, procedures for termination of student placement, class size and age range, exceptions for class size and age range, special class program descriptions maintained at county office, certifications for specialized populations, special classes serving students with similar educational needs, collaboration for home instruction conformance to pupil record code, return of records upon termination, access sheets, location of other records specified in central file, daily attendance available to LEAs, written communication to LEAs regarding five days of tardiness/absences, written notice of placement to county office and maintenance of student health records.

During the self-assessment process, the Horizon School identified areas of need regarding policies and procedures, maintenance of hearing aids, frequency and duration of related services, criminal history verification, IEP meeting conducted at least annually, communication to sending districts regarding missing IEP components, inconsistency of related service information in initial IEPs, standard disciplinary procedures, use of restraints, changes to program/placement pending mediation and due process, staff training for procedures for behavioral intervention plans, trained and instructing in CCCSs, dispensing medication, nursing services, policies and procedures relating to school functions and services and medical exams for sport teams, notation of decentralized records and mandated health records and access to records.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding, provision of services and related services as per IEP, evaluation of related services and assistive technology, certified licensed staff, documentation of boiler inspection and implementation of specialized instructional techniques.

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