

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

**District:** Shamong School District

**County:** Burlington

**Monitoring Dates:** November 27,28,30, 2001

**Monitoring Team:** Kenneth Richards and Deborah Knauss

**Background Information:**

During the 2000 – 2001 school year, the Shamong School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self- assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Shamong 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 Shamong School District developed an improvement plan to address identified areas of need.

The Office of Special Education Programs conducted an on-site monitoring to verify the self-assessment findings, determine the appropriateness of the improvement plan, and determine the progress in implementing the plan.

As the first step in the on-site monitoring process, the NJDOE held a focus group meeting for parents and community members at the Indian Mills Elementary School on November 15, 2001. Information obtained from that meeting was used to direct the focus of the monitoring visit.

During the on-site, 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, special education teachers, related service staff and child study team members.

**Area Demonstrating Compliance With All Standards:**

**Statewide Assessment** was determined to be an area of compliance by the district during self-assessment and by the Office of Special Education Programs during the on-site visit.

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## **I. General Provisions**

### **Summary of Findings:**

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

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of professional/parent development and dissemination of IDEA information. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address the area of professional and parent development because it lacks a mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component. The improvement plan must also be expanded to include areas of need identified by staff and parents during the on-site visit. These areas include the special education code, language arts/reading, speech/language, effective use of collaborative planning time, and training in developing instructional strategies. The improvement plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district did not submit an improvement plan to address the issue of dissemination of IDEA information. The plan needs to be revised to include procedures to bring about the required changes.

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

## **II. F.A.P.E.**

### **Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of length of school day/year, facilities and certifications.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of extended school year, transfer students, IEP revisions and oversight of progress of students placed in out-of-district programs. The district has developed an improvement plan in the area of extended school year and monitoring the progress of out-of-district students that is insufficient because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan in the area of transfer students and revisions to the IEP that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year and related services.

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### Areas of Need:

**Extended School Year** – During the on-site, information obtained through interviews indicated that ESY is not considered and discussed for every student.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure ESY is considered, discussed, and documented for every student. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures.**

**Related Services** – During the on-site, information obtained through record review and staff interviews indicated that students are not receiving related services in accordance with the frequency and location identified in their IEPs. Staff further indicated that decisions regarding the type and frequency of related services is based on staff availability and not on the individual needs of the students.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure related services are provided in accordance with IEP requirements. The plan must also ensure that decisions regarding the need for related services are based on the individual needs of students and not on the availability of staff. The plan must include a mechanism to determine whether the district has staff in sufficient numbers to provide related services. The plan must further include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

### III. Procedural Safeguards

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and native language.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of surrogate parents, consent, notice of meetings, written notice, the provision of special education, due process hearing rules and documenting multiple attempts to secure parental participation at meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district also identified a concern in the area of independent evaluations. The improvement plan is insufficient because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan must be revised to include this component.

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

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### IV. Location, Referral, Identification

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of summer referrals, health summary, and vision/hearing screenings.

During the self-assessment process, the district-identified concerns in the areas of child find activities, referral process, identification meeting timelines, and meeting participants. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address the areas of child find and the referral process because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of procedures. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address the areas of meeting participants and identification meeting timelines because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

#### Areas of Need:

**Child Find Activities** – During the on-site, interviews conducted with staff indicated that child find activities are not conducted for students who are beyond the elementary school age range.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district conducts activities to locate, refer and identify students between the ages of three and twenty-one including homeless and migrant students. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

**Direct Referrals** – During the on-site, information obtained through staff interviews indicated that direct referrals do not always result in the required identification meeting within twenty days of receiving the referral. Instead, they are referred back to PAC before an appropriately configured team has the opportunity to determine the need for an evaluation.

- **The district will revise the improvement plan to include procedures to ensure staff have the ability to directly refer a student to the child study team and to participate in meetings when they believe the nature of the student's problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At that meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to PAC. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish a criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include in- service and an administrative oversight component to ensure full, consistent implementation of these activities.**

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### V. Evaluation

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of standardized assessments and written reports.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of multi-disciplinary reports, bilingual evaluations, and acceptance/rejection of reports. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks in-service and an administrative oversight component to ensure procedures are being implemented in a consistent, complaint manner. The district further identified concerns relating to the evaluation process for students determined eligible for speech/language services in the areas of multi-disciplinary evaluations, written reports and functional assessments. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

### VI. Reevaluation

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of planning meetings and turning age five.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of timelines. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area because it lacks an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include this component.

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

#### Area of Need:

**Participants** – During the on-site, information obtained during staff interviews indicated that while the district does conduct planning meetings and efforts are made to obtain coverage for teachers, these efforts are typically unsuccessful.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure required participants attend and participate in mandated meetings. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

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### VII. Eligibility

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of meetings and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of criteria for eligibility and documentation of eligibility. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these components.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding meeting participants. The improvement plan developed in response to reevaluation planning meeting participants will address this issue, as well.

### VIII. IEP

#### Summary of Findings:

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of annual review timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of participants, IEP components, goals and objectives aligned to the CCCS, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, teacher knowledge/access and reconvening IEP meetings. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding age of majority and participation.

#### Areas of Need:

**Age of Majority** – During the on-site, information obtained during record review indicated that the provision of information regarding the transfer of rights when a student attains the age of majority is not documented.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district documents it has provided parents and adult students with information regarding the transfer of rights at least three years before the students attains the age of majority. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

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### **IX. Least Restrictive Environment**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of supplemental aids and services

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of individualized decision-making, consideration/documentation, continuum and participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

### **X. Transition - Preschool**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of preschool transition planning conferences.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the area of EIP to PSD by age three and summer evaluations for preschoolers. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

### **X. Transition - Post- School to Secondary**

During self-assessment, the district did not address post-school transition because they are a K to 8 district and were unaware of their responsibility to develop a statement of transition service needs for students in the district who will turn fourteen years of age prior to the development of a new IEP by the receiving district.

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

**Transition Components** - Information obtained through interviews during the on-site monitoring process determined that the district does not identify courses of study, technical consultation when appropriate and documentation of student interests and preferences for those students who will turn fourteen years of age prior to the development of a new IEP by the receiving district.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure IEPs for students who will be fourteen prior to the development of a new IEP by the receiving district, include all required transition**

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**components. The plan must also include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

**XI. Discipline**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of procedures, documentation to case manager, suspension tracking, manifestation determination and IAES.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of behavior intervention plans. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

**XIII. Graduation**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the area of diploma.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding participation.

**Area of Need:**

**Participation** – During the on-site, information obtained during staff interviews indicated that students placed in out-of-district programs are not consistently invited to participate in eighth grade graduation activities.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure students placed in out-of-district programs are afforded the opportunity to participate in graduation activities. The plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure implementation of these procedures.**

**XIV. Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of age range and group size for speech therapy.



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During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns in the areas of class size, common planning time, home instruction approval, in-class resource programs and program descriptions. The district has developed an improvement plan that is sufficient to address the area of program descriptions. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address the other identified issues because it lacks procedures, in-service and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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

### **XV. Student Records**

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

During the self-assessment process the district accurately identified themselves compliant in the areas of access sheets, maintenance, destruction and documentation of location of student records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified a concern in the area of parent/student access to records. The district has developed an improvement plan that is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-service and administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements.

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 Shamong School District on November 27, 28 and 30, 2001. 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 thorough and 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 and in written comments provided by parents who did not attend the meeting, parents expressed their satisfaction and concerns with many of the district's programs and services. Many of the concerns raised by the parents during the focus group meeting had already been identified by the district during the self-assessment process. Among those concerns most consistently raised by parents were regular education access, least restrictive environment, individual decision-making and communication. Parents consistently cited administrative barriers as the reason for their concern. The majority of parents in attendance felt that the programs provided by the district did not meet the individual needs of students and that appropriate programs were developed and provided only when parents filed for due process.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies, procedures, statewide assessments, length of school day/year, certification, facilities, native language, summer referrals, health summary, vision/hearing screenings, standardized assessments, reevaluation planning meetings, turning age five, eligibility meetings and the provision of copies of reports to parents, annual review timelines, supplemental aides and services, preschool transition planning conferences, discipline issues, graduation diploma, age range, group size, access sheets, maintenance, destruction and location of student records

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding professional development, parent communication and training, reports, ESY, summer programs, transfer students, IEP revisions, oversight of students placed in out-of-district programs, surrogate parents, consent, written notice, notice of meetings, independent evaluations, provision of due process hearing rules, attempts to secure parent participation, child find activities, referral processes, identification meeting timelines, meeting participants, multidisciplinary reports, written reports, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of reports, reevaluation timelines, criteria and documentation of eligibility, consideration/required statements, goals and objectives aligned to the CCCS, implementation dates, 90-day timelines, teacher access/knowledge, individualized decision-making, consideration and documentation, continuum, regular education access and participation in extra-curricular and non-academic activities, EIP to PSD by age three, summer evaluations for preschoolers, behavior intervention plans, class size, common planning time, home instruction, program descriptions and in-class resource programs and parent student access to records.

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The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding staff development, parent training, ESY, related services, child find activities, direct referral processes, meeting participants, age of majority, documenting transition service needs and graduation,

Within forty-five days of receipt of the monitoring report, the district will revise and resubmit the improvement plan to the Office of Special Education Programs to address the areas of need identified during the on-site visit and those areas that require revisions to the improvement plan.

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