

## New Jersey Department of Education Special Education Monitoring

**District:** Spotswood School District

**County:** Middlesex

**Monitoring Dates:** October 28, 29, 2002

**Monitoring Team:** Dorothenia Boyd-Jackson, Stephen Coplin, Debra Masarsky

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

During the 2001-2002 school year, the Spotswood School District conducted a self-assessment of policies, procedures, programs, services, and student outcomes. This self-assessment component of the monitoring process provided the Spotswood 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 Spotswood 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 Spotswood School District on October 24, 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 is commended for providing the **Workplace Experience Program**, which is designed to provide students with the opportunity to acquire workplace skills. Students who participate in the Workplace Experience Program receive 20 credits for the job related experience. The classroom teacher, a job coach and the student's employer support the participant through this endeavor.

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The district also provides an **Asperger's Student Group**, which focuses student discussions on topics pertaining to Asperger Syndrome and the educational process.

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

**Reevaluation and Statewide Assessment** 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 regarding policies/procedures and dissemination of IDEA public information.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding staff/paraprofessional/parent training. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the 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.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding provision of programs, related services, length of day/year, transfer students, facilities and certification of staff.

An area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding extended school year.

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

**Extended School Year** - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and record review indicated that extended school year services are not consistently discussed for every student at IEP meetings. In addition, when an extended school year is discussed at an IEP meeting, the IEP does not include the criteria used to make those determinations nor does the IEP contain a description of the extended school year program.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district discusses extended school year services for all students, documents the criteria used to determine eligibility, and includes a description of the extended school year program. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding surrogate parents, consent, interpreters at meetings and independent evaluations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding notice of a meeting and prior written notice. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding notices in native language.

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

**Notices in Native Language** - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and record review indicated that the district does not provide notices in the native language, even when feasible.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the district provides notices in the native language, when feasible. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding direct referrals from parents and identification meetings timelines/participants.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the referral process/pre-referral interventions. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, complaint implementation of the procedures. The plan needs to be revised to include these components. The district further identified concerns regarding vision/hearing screenings. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address this area. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in this area.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding Child Find activities, health/medical summaries and direct referrals from staff.

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**Area(s) of Need:**

**Child Find** – During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district’s Child Find activities are insufficient to locate, identify and refer potentially disabled students because these activities are not conducted throughout the year and do not include homeless and migrant children.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that Child Find activities are conducted throughout the year and include activities to locate, identify and refer potentially disabled homeless and migrant children.**

**Health/Medical Summaries** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district’s school nurse does not review and summarize the student’s existing health information when a student is referred to the child study team.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that upon receipt of a referral to the child study team, the school nurse reviews and summarizes available health and medical information for that student. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Direct Referrals from Staff** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews that the district’s referral process does not permit teachers to make direct referrals to the child study team.

- **The district will revise its 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 a meeting when they believe the nature of the student’s problem is such that an evaluation is warranted without delay. At the meeting, a decision may be made that an evaluation is not warranted and that the student needs to be referred to the PAC committee. The improvement plan must include a mechanism to establish criteria that identifies the type of documentation that would support a staff request for a direct referral. The plan must further include in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

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

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations and acceptance/rejection of reports.

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Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding evaluation reports for students eligible for speech/language services and reports for students eligible for special education/related services.

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

**Evaluation Reports** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through interviews with speech therapists and record review that therapists are not developing reports when assessing students who are eligible for speech language services, only.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language therapists develop written reports for each student assessed. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Reports** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that although members of the child study team develop written reports, they do not date them. As a result, one cannot determine when the report was developed.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that members of the child study team date their evaluation reports when developed. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

### **Section VII: Eligibility**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding eligibility meeting participants, criteria and the provision of copies of evaluation reports to parents/adult students.

Areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding statement of eligibility for specific learning disability (SLD) and documentation of agreement/disagreement with eligibility determinations.

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

**Statement of Eligibility for Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review that the eligibility statement for students exhibiting a specific learning disability does not contain a severe discrepancy statement, nor does it document that the term specific learning disability does not apply to students who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, general cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the eligibility statement for specific learning disability includes all components as required in N.J.A.C. 6A:14:3.5(c)11. The improvement**

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

**Documentation of Agreement/Disagreement with Eligibility** - During the on-site visit, staff interviews and record review indicated that the district does not document the agreement/disagreement of IEP team members with the determination of eligibility.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that the district documents the agreement/disagreement by IEP team members with the determination of eligibility. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding IEP participants, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents, teacher access to IEPs and 90-day timelines.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding teacher responsibility for implementing the IEP, resource center and self-contained program goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards and IEP considerations/required statements. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas.

Additional areas of need were identified during the on-site visit regarding placement/program changes without convening IEP meetings and annual review timelines for students determined eligible for speech/language services..

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

**Placement/Program Changes** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that the district implements changes to a student's placement/program without convening an IEP meeting and without [providing written notice of the proposed changes.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that an IEP meeting is convened prior to any change in a student's placement/program. The improvement plan must include in-service and a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Annual Review Timelines** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through record review that speech/language therapists inconsistently complete annual reviews for their students within the required timelines.

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- The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that speech/language therapists complete annual reviews in a timely manner. The improvement 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 regarding regular education access in-district and notification to out-of-district students of in-district non-academic/extracurricular activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the decision-making process, supplemental aids and services, continuum of placement options and LRE documentation. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, in-service, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the 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.

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

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding Statements of Transition Service Needs, Needed Transition Services, documentation of student preferences/interests and student/agency invitations.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding the need to increase student participation in post-school activities. The district'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**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding pre-school transition planning conferences and early intervention program to a preschool disabilities program by age 3.

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

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### **Section XI: Discipline**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding documentation to the case manager, suspension tracking and interim alternative educational settings.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans and manifestation determinations. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address these areas of need because it lacks procedures, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training and an administrative oversight component to bring about the required changes. The plan needs to be revised to include these elements. The district further identified concerns regarding procedural safeguards for potentially disabled students. The district's improvement plan is insufficient to address this area of need because it lacks procedures, in-services, a mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the 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.

### **Section XIII: Graduation**

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

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding out-of-district students' participation in graduation activities.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding written notice of graduation and increasing student opportunities for graduation. The district's improvement plan is sufficient to address these areas. During the on-site visit, a review of records and staff interviews indicated that the district has appropriately implemented specific activities to bring about correction in these areas

An additional area of need was identified during the on-site visit regarding documentation of the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) as a graduation requirement.

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

**Documentation of HSPA as a Graduation Requirement** - During the on-site visit, it was determined through staff interviews and record review that when a student is exempt from passing the HSPA, the district does not document in the IEP the rationale for exemption or the alternate requirement.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure that when a student is exempt from passing the HSPA as a graduation requirement, the district documents within the Graduation section of the student's IEP, the rationale for the exemption and an alternate requirement. The improvement plan must include an**

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**administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent, compliant implementation of the procedures.**

**Section XIV: Programs and Services**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding age range, group size and home instruction.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified concerns regarding consultation time for teachers, insufficient personnel and description of special education classes.

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

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Class Size** - During the on-site visit, it was determined that class sizes for in-class support programs exceeds code limits.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure in-class support class sizes comply with code mandates. The improvement plan must include an administrative oversight component to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedures.**

**Section XV: Student Records**

**Summary of Findings:**

During self-assessment the district accurately identified themselves compliant regarding student records access/requests, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of records.

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

**Area(s) of Need:**

**Documentation of Other Locations** - During the on-site visit, it was determined that the district does not identify the location of other student records maintained by the district in the central file.

- **The district will revise its improvement plan to include procedures to ensure the central files identifies the location of other student records maintained by the district.**

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## Summary

On-site special education monitoring was conducted in the Spotswood School District on October 28, 29, 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 comprehensive review conducted during the self-assessment process. As a result of that review the district was able to identify areas of need and develop an improvement plan that with some revision 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.

At a focus group meeting held prior to the monitoring visit, the three parents who attended the meeting expressed their satisfaction with many of the district's programs and services and with the communication between staff and parents. One parent of an out-of-district student indicated she had not received information regarding in-district activities.

Standards identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included all areas of reevaluation and statewide assessment.

Areas identified as consistently compliant by the district during self-assessment and verified during the on-site monitoring visit included policies/procedures, dissemination of IDEA public information, provision of programs, related services, length of day/year, transfer students, facilities, certification of staff, surrogate parents, consent, interpreters at meetings, independent evaluations, direct referrals from parents, identification meeting timelines and participants, multi-disciplinary evaluations, standardized assessments, functional assessments, bilingual evaluations, acceptance/rejection of outside reports, eligibility meeting participants, criteria, provision of evaluation reports to parents/adult students, IEP participants, age of majority, implementation dates, annual review timelines, IEPs to parents/adult students, teacher access to IEPs, 90-day timelines, regular education access in district, notification to out-of-district students of in-district non-academic/extracurricular activities, statement of transition service needs at age 14, documentation of student preferences/interests, statement of needed transition services at age 16, student/agency invitation, pre-school transition planning conferences, early intervention program to a preschool disabilities program by age 3, documentation of suspension to the case manager, suspension tracking, interim alternative educational settings, out-of-district students' participation in graduation activities, age range, group size, home instruction, student records access/requests, access sheets and maintenance/destruction of records.

During the self-assessment process, the district identified areas of need regarding staff/paraprofessional/parent training, notice of a meeting, written notice, referral process/pre-referral interventions, vision/hearing screenings, teacher responsibility for implementing the IEP, resource center and self-contained program curricular/goals and objectives aligned with the core curriculum content standards, IEP considerations/required statements, decision-making process/supplemental aids and services, continuum of placement options, least restrictive environment documentation (LRE), student participation in post-school activities, functional behavioral assessment (FBA), behavioral intervention plan (BIP), manifestation determination, procedural safeguards for the potentially disabled, written notice of graduation, increasing student

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opportunities for graduation, consultation time for teachers, personnel insufficient in numbers, special class program descriptions.

The on-site visit identified additional areas of need within the various standards regarding extended school year, notices in native language, Child Find, health summaries, direct referrals from staff, evaluation reports, dated reports, statement of eligibility for specific learning disability, documentation of agreement/disagreement with determination of eligibility, placement/program changes, annual review timelines, documentation of HSPA, class size and documentation of locations of other student records.

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