

# Santa Rosa County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring

Exceptional Student Education Programs

March 22-24, 2010



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Florida Department of Education

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May 24, 2010

Mr. Tim Wyrosdick, Superintendent  
Santa Rosa County School District  
5086 Canal Street  
Milton, FL 32570-2257

Dear Superintendent Wyrosdick:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report of On-Site Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for Santa Rosa County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district on March 22–24, 2010, including student record reviews, interviews with school and district staff, and classroom observations. The final report will be posted on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services' website and may be accessed at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp>.

The Santa Rosa County School District was selected for an on-site monitoring visit due to students with disabilities being reported for weighted funding at the 255 cost factor through the Florida Education Finance Program at more than 150 percent of the state rate. Ms. Linda Novota, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Director, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and during the on-site monitoring. In addition, the principals and other staff members at the schools visited welcomed and assisted Bureau staff members. The Bureau's on-site monitoring activities identified some discrepancies that require corrective action. The results of the on-site monitoring visit are included in the enclosed report.

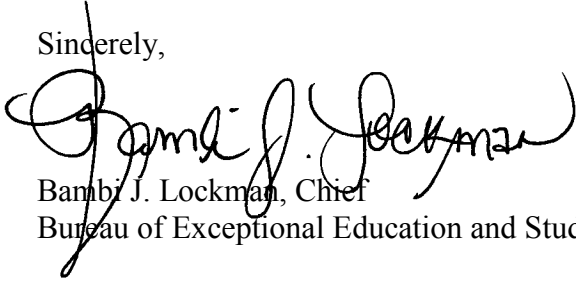
**BAMBI J. LOCKMAN**  
*Chief*

*Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services*

Mr. Tim Wyrosdick  
May 24, 2010  
Page Two

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Santa Rosa County. If there are any questions regarding this final report, please contact Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance, at (850) 245-0476 or via electronic mail at [Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org](mailto:Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bambi J. Lockman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Bambi J. Lockman, Chief  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Enclosure

cc: Linda Novota  
Stephanie Lynch  
Kim C. Komisar  
Patricia Howell  
Jill Snelson

**Santa Rosa County School District  
Final Report: On-Site Monitoring  
Exceptional Student Education Programs**

**March 22–24, 2010**

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# **Santa Rosa County School District**

## **On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs March 22–24, 2010**

### **Final Report**

#### **Authority**

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (Bureau), in carrying out its roles of leadership, resource allocation, technical assistance, monitoring, and evaluation, is required to oversee the performance of district school boards in the enforcement of all laws and rules (sections 1001.03(8) and 1008.32, Florida Statutes [F.S.]). In fulfilling this requirement, the Bureau conducts monitoring activities of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs provided by district school boards, in accordance with sections 1001.42 and 1003.57, F.S. Through these monitoring activities, the Bureau examines and evaluates procedures, records, and ESE programs; provides information and assistance to school districts; and otherwise assists school districts to operate effectively and efficiently. One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (section 300.1(d) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations [34 CFR §300.1(d)]). In accordance with IDEA, FDOE is responsible for ensuring that its requirements are carried out and that each educational program for children with disabilities administered in the state meets the educational requirements of the state (34 CFR §§300.120, 300.149, and 300.600). The monitoring system reflects FDOE's commitment to provide assistance, service, and accountability to school districts and is designed to emphasize improved educational outcomes for students while continuing to conduct those activities necessary to ensure compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations and state statutes and rules.

#### **Monitoring Process**

##### **District Selection**

For the 2009–10 school year, the Bureau's ESE monitoring system comprised basic (Level 1) and focused (Level 2) self-assessment activities, as well as on-site visits conducted by Bureau staff (Level 3). This system was developed to ensure that school districts comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and state statutes and rules, while focusing on improving student outcomes related to State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators.

All districts were required to complete Level 1 activities. In addition, those districts that were newly identified for targeted planning or activities by the Bureau SPP indicator teams for one or more selected SPP indicators were required to conduct Level 2 self-assessment activities using indicator-specific protocols. Districts selected for Level 3 monitoring conducted Level 1 and

Level 2 activities as applicable. Selection of districts for consideration for Level 3 monitoring was based on analysis of the districts' data, with the following criteria applied:

- Matrix of services:
  - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 150 percent of the state rate for **at least one** of the following cost factors:
    - 254 (> 7.83 percent)
    - 255 (> 3.20 percent)
    - 254/255 combined (> 11.03 percent)
  - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 125 percent of the state rate for **two or more** of the following cost factors:
    - 254 (> 6.53 percent)
    - 255 (> 2.66 percent)
    - 254/255 combined (> 9.19 percent)
- Timeliness of correction of noncompliance regarding corrective action(s) due between July 1, 2008, and June 30, 2009 – two or more of the following criteria:
  - Student-specific noncompliance identified through monitoring not corrected within 60 days
  - Systemic noncompliance identified through monitoring not corrected as soon as possible, but in no case longer than one year from identification
  - Noncompliance identified through a state complaint investigation or due process hearing not corrected within the established timeline
- Pattern of poor performance over time in one or more targeted SPP indicators, as evidenced by demonstrated progress below that of other targeted districts, **and** at least one of the following:
  - Targeted for a given SPP indicator or cluster of indicators for three consecutive years
  - Targeted for two or more SPP indicators or clusters of indicators for two consecutive years

In a letter dated December 11, 2009, the Santa Rosa County School District superintendent was informed that the district was selected for a Level 3 on-site visit due to matrix levels being greater than 150 percent of the state rate for the 255 cost factor.

## **On-Site Activities**

### ***Monitoring Team***

On March 22–24, 2010, Bureau staff members conducted an on-site monitoring visit, which included meeting with district staff to discuss strategies in place to address matrix levels. The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit:

- Jill Snelson, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Annette Oliver, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance

### ***Schools***

The following schools were selected for on-site visits based on the number of students with matrix of services cost factors of 254 and 255:

- Bennett Russell Elementary School
- East Milton Elementary School
- Milton High School
- Pace High School

### ***Data Collection***

Individual educational plans (IEPs) for 37 randomly selected students with disabilities enrolled in grades prekindergarten through 12 in the Santa Rosa County School District were reviewed regarding matrix of services documentation. In addition, monitoring activities included the following:

- District-level interview – 8 participants
- School-level interviews – 10 participants
- Case studies – 15 students

### ***Review of Records***

The district was asked to provide the following documents for each student selected for the matrix review:

- Current IEP
- Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)/behavioral intervention plan (BIP), if any
- Therapy logs
- Any other supporting documentation as required by the *Matrix of Services Handbook*

This documentation was reviewed to verify that the services indicated on the matrix of services document were supported by the IEP and provided to the student as required.

### **Results**

The following results reflect the data collected through the activities of the on-site monitoring as well as commendations, concerns, and findings of noncompliance. Additional documentation was requested during the on-site visit to verify matrix services levels.

### **Commendations**

- The schools were pleasant and orderly with an appearance of being well-organized.
- School faculty members demonstrated a high level of professionalism and commitment to the students.
- A high level of collaboration was evidenced between ESE teachers and related services providers.
- Parent communication and involvement were demonstrated.
- General education students were involved as academic mentors with younger ESE students.
- The student-operated Patriot Express Café was an excellent example of a student-based enterprise.

## Concerns

- Health care providers of students who have health care plans were not being invited to the IEP team meetings.
- On the prekindergarten students' matrix of services documents, the extra 13 points under *Special Considerations* were sometimes indicated in the wrong area, or not indicated at all, although they were included in the total cost factor.
- Teachers who complete BIPs have indicated that they need formal training in this area.

## Findings of Noncompliance

Section 1011.62(1)(e), F.S., describes the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funding model for exceptional student education programs, including basic, at-risk, support levels IV and V for exceptional students, career cost factors, and a guaranteed allocation for ESE programs. Exceptional education cost factors are determined by using a matrix of services to document the services that each exceptional student will receive. This model is designed to provide funds to a school district for the services that the district pays for or provides. If the district has a cost-sharing arrangement for services, they may not be reported for weighted funding by the district. In addition, the nature and intensity of the services indicated on the matrix are to be consistent with the services described in the exceptional student's IEP. If a student with a disability is enrolled in a special program (e.g., dropout prevention program) and requires a service that is routinely provided to all students in that program, including nondisabled students, the district cannot claim weighted funding for that service via the matrix.

The Santa Rosa County School District is only one of eight districts in Florida that provides services within the home environment through Early Steps for children ages birth through three. District staff report that the reputation of this unique program has encouraged families to move to the district to participate in the early intervention program, which may contribute to the higher number of students with 254/255 cost factors.

Upon final review of documentation related to the matrix of services, discrepancies that resulted in a change in the total cost factor were noted in eight of the 37 records. Identifying information regarding those students was provided to the district prior to the dissemination of this report. Six of the eight discrepant matrixes were reported at a cost factor of 254 but were reviewed by the Bureau at a cost factor of 253. The remaining two discrepant records were reported at a cost factor of 255 and were reviewed by the Bureau at a cost factor of 254.

## Corrective Action

The matrix of services document must accurately reflect the current level of services being provided for the student as indicated on a student's IEP. The district shall correct the funding levels within the Automated Student Information System database for the eight students for whom on-site observations and interviews did not verify that these students needed or were receiving services at the funding levels referenced on the matrix. Verification of this correction shall be provided to the Bureau **no later than July 9, 2010**.

## Technical Assistance

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding matrix training and completion can be found in the *Matrix of Services Handbook*.

## Bureau Contacts

The following is a partial list of Bureau staff available for technical assistance:

### ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance

(850) 245-0476

Kim Komisar, Ph.D., Administrator  
[Kim.Komisar@fldoe.org](mailto:Kim.Komisar@fldoe.org)

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**Florida Department of Education  
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**Glossary of Acronyms**

BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
FBA	Functional behavioral assessment
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
FEFP	Florida Education Finance Program
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
SPP	State Performance Plan



**Florida Department of Education  
Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner**

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