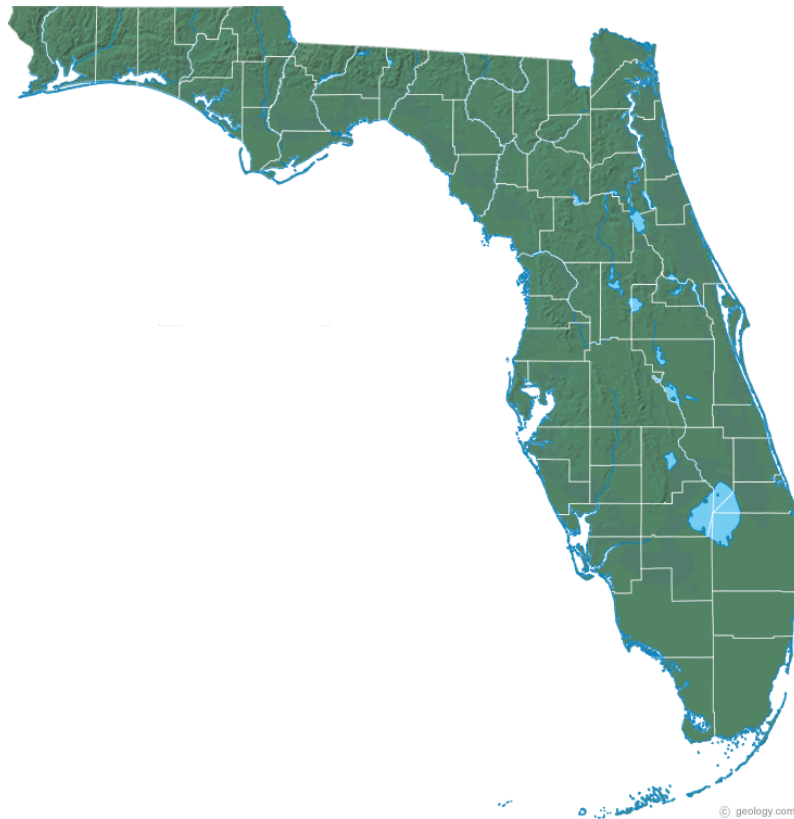


# Pasco County School District

Final Report: On-Site Review

Exceptional Student Education Programs

September 28–October 1, 2010



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Florida Department of Education

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November 30, 2010

Ms. Heather Fiorentino, Superintendent  
Pasco County School District  
7227 Land O' Lakes Boulevard  
Land O' Lakes, FL 34638

Dear Superintendent Fiorentino:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Review of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Pasco County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district September 28–October 1, 2010, which included 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 Pasco County School District was selected for an on-site visit due to its status as a pilot district for PS/RtI implementation. Ms. Monica Verra, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Administrative Director, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and during the on-site visit, as was Ms. Amelia Van Name Larson, Curriculum and Instructional Services Supervisor. In addition, the principals and other staff members at the schools visited welcomed and assisted Bureau staff members. The Bureau's on-site visit identified strengths within the district's PS/RtI processes and targets for support.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Pasco 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 e-mail at [Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org](mailto:Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bambi J. Lockman".

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

Enclosure

cc: Ruth B. Reilly    Monica Verra    Kathy Zielinski    Amelia Van Name Larson

**BAMBI J. LOCKMAN**  
*Chief*  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services



**Pasco County School District**

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**Exceptional Student Education Programs**

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**Pasco County School District**  
**Final Report: On-Site Review**  
**Problem Solving/Response to Instruction or Intervention**  
**(PS/RtI)**  
**September 28–October 1, 2010**

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# Pasco County School District

## On-Site Review Problem Solving/Response to Instruction or Intervention (PS/RtI)

September 28–October 1, 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.]). One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (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 [CFR]). In accordance with IDEA, the Bureau is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Act and the educational requirements of the state are implemented (34 CFR §300.149(a)(1) and (2)).

In fulfilling this requirement, the Bureau monitors 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 services; provides information and assistance to school districts; and otherwise helps school districts operate effectively and efficiently. The monitoring system is designed to emphasize improved educational outcomes for students while ensuring compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations and state statutes and rules.

#### Monitoring Process

##### District Selection

Districts were selected for on-site monitoring during the 2010–11 school year based on the following criteria:

- Matrix of services:
  - Districts that report students for weighted funding at >150 percent of the state rate for **at least one** of the following:
    - 254 (>7.38 percent)
    - 255 (>3.15 percent)
    - 254/255 combined (>10.53 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 (>6.15 percent)
    - 255 (>2.63 percent)

- 254/255 combined (>8.78 percent)
- Pattern of poor performance over time in one or more targeted State Performance Plan (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
- Problem-solving/response to instruction or intervention
  - Eligible for on-site monitoring based on matrix of services or a pattern of poor performance over time on SPP indicators
  - Status as a pilot district for PS/RtI implementation; extent of implementation thus far

In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Pasco County School District superintendent was informed that the district was selected for a Level 3 on-site visit due to its status as a pilot district for PS/RtI implementation.

## **On-Site Activities**

### ***Monitoring Team***

During September 28–October 1, 2010, Bureau staff members conducted an on-site visit, which included meeting with district staff to discuss the district’s implementation of a PS/RtI process as it carries out its child find obligation to identify and evaluate students suspected of having a disability. The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit:

- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Heather Diamond, Program Specialist, Program Development and Services
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Derek Hemenway, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution
- Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance
- Jill Snelson, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- David Wheeler, Psychology Consultant, Student Services

### ***Schools***

Schools were selected to reflect different stages of PS/RtI implementation. In collaboration with district staff, the following schools were chosen for on-site visits:

- Fox Hollow Elementary School
- Mittye P. Locke Elementary School
- New River Elementary School
- San Antonio Elementary School
- Seven Oaks Elementary School

### ***Data Collection***

On-site activities included the following:

- District-level interview – 4 participants
- School-level interviews – 83 participants
- Case studies – 15 students enrolled in kindergarten through grade five

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

The district was asked to provide documentation related to the PS/RtI process for 15 students in five schools who had been evaluated during the past year. This information was used to examine implementation of PS/RtI across the district.

### **Results**

There were no findings of noncompliance identified during the review of records. The following results reflect the data collected through the activities of the on-site visit as well as strengths, targets for support, and recommendations.

### **Strengths**

The following comments apply to all of the schools visited:

- Pleasant, orderly, and well-organized schools
- High level of professionalism, commitment, and collaboration among staff members
- Sense of shared ownership of PS/RtI by general education and ESE staff
- Strong administrative leadership
- Strong belief in and support for a PS/RtI framework, including reliance on data to inform instructional decisions
- Professional development regarding PS/RtI implementation, including district-developed training that incorporates both behavior and academics
- Collaboration with organizations such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the Positive Behavior Support Project
- PS/RtI coaches used as “systems-change” coaches

In addition, the monitoring team noted the following regarding individual schools visited:

- Fox Hollow Elementary School
  - Good documentation of multiple data sources
  - Staff provided with extension activities and opportunities to practice problem solving
  - Evidence of progress with a transient student population
  - Continuity of support and collaboration despite staff turnover
- Mittye P. Locke Elementary School:
  - Individual students assigned to specific teachers based on unique characteristics and needs
  - Professional development integrated and based on faculty needs as determined through systematic problem solving
  - Students’ use of the problem-solving process for goal setting
  - Flexibility in use of resources (e.g., ESE specialists and other staff, regardless of title, used as support facilitators or otherwise, based on student needs)
- New River Elementary School:
  - Support staff included in school professional learning communities
  - Ongoing and embedded systems training to address staff turnover
  - Flexibility and fluidity of staff in assuming different roles based on student need
  - Feedback from staff solicited for continuous improvement in PS/RtI implementation
- San Antonio Elementary School:
  - Clear evidence of multiple data sources

- Scheduled celebrations of success
- Strong commitment to use of evidence-based curriculum matched to student need
- Grade-level team participation in the problem-solving process
- Seven Oaks Elementary School:
  - Sharing sessions between former and current teachers regarding student needs
  - Forms modified to assist teams in the problem-solving process
  - Students graphing their own data
  - Effective organization of data and paperwork

## **Concerns**

Pasco County School District personnel identified the following as areas of concern or topics for which additional technical assistance or support is needed:

- A successful problem-solving framework often relies on more extensive use of general education resources than has historically been the case. There is concern about the potential impact if fewer students are found to need special education services, resulting in a decrease in ESE funding, with no concomitant increase in general education funding to support an effective multi-tiered system of supports.
- Effective problem solving requires teams to devote a significant amount of time analyzing and addressing the needs of groups of students as well as individual students. Finding sufficient periods of time when all team members are available is challenging.
- Time constraints often result in multiple students being discussed during a single meeting. Strategies are needed to increase parent participation in multiple levels of the problem-solving process while maintaining confidentiality regarding other students.
- Promoting the understanding that the primary purpose of PS/RtI is to support improvement across all schools and all students continues to be a challenge, as it is often believed to be primarily an evaluation tool for ESE eligibility.
- There is a lack of understanding within the medical community of the logic behind PS/RtI, which results in physicians giving parents inaccurate information regarding their children's need for special education.
- Because resources vary across schools and districts, there is a concern that a student who does not need special education in one school because of the significant supports that are available may transfer to another school that cannot provide the same level of support.

## **Targets for Support**

In addition to ensuring that the district is implementing the child find requirements for identifying and evaluating students with disabilities, the purpose for conducting on-site monitoring of PS/RtI is to identify those areas for which additional training, technical assistance, or other support are needed. This information can be used by both the district and the Bureau to inform decisions regarding resource allocation and product development (e.g., topics to address through training modules).

In addition, Bureau staff members identified the following as areas for which additional training, technical assistance, or support are indicated:

- Use of graphing tools to support data-based decision making
- Documentation of gap analyses; use of the results to inform intervention decisions and establish criteria for determining whether positive response to intervention is sufficient
- Development and testing of hypotheses to support identification of effective interventions
- Development and implementation of support plans to ensure staff responsible for intervention implementation have the required skills and resources
- Assessing the integrity and fidelity of interventions; revising interventions or providing additional support if needed
- Ensuring follow-up meetings are scheduled during problem-solving meetings

### **Technical Assistance**

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding problem solving and response to instruction or intervention can be found on the Bureau's response to instruction/intervention website at <http://www.florida-rti.org/> and the specific learning disabilities (SLD) resource page at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/sld.asp>.

### **Bureau Contacts**

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

**ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance**  
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**Florida Department of Education  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

**Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
PS/RtI	Problem solving/response to instruction or intervention
SLD	Specific learning disabilities
SPP	State Performance Plan



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

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