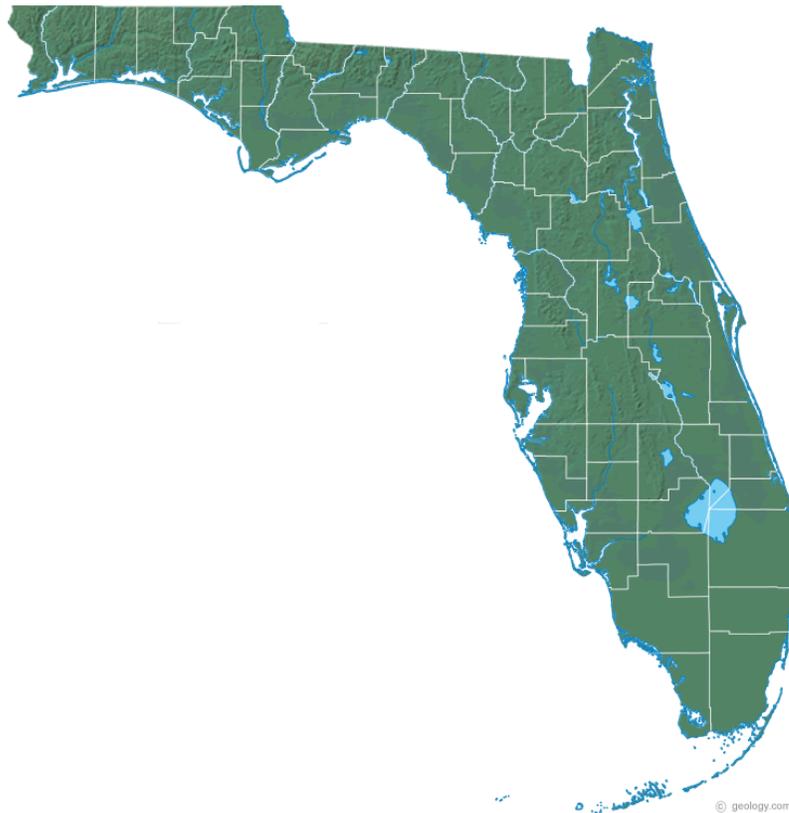


# Dixie County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring

Exceptional Student Education Programs

May 6-7, 2010



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Florida Department of Education

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July 6, 2010

Mr. Mark A. Rains, Superintendent  
Dixie County School District  
P.O. Box 890  
Cross City, FL 32628-0890

Dear Superintendent Rains:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report of On-Site Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for Dixie County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district May 6–7, 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/ease/mon-home.asp>.

The Dixie County School District was selected for an on-site monitoring visit due to a pattern of poor performance over time in State Performance Plan (SPP) indicator one, percent of youth with individual educational plan (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma. Mr. Ken Baumer, Assistant Superintendent, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Student Services, and his 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 district demonstrated promising practices relating to youths with IEPs graduating high school with a regular diploma; however, the Bureau's on-site monitoring activities identified some discrepancies that require corrective action.

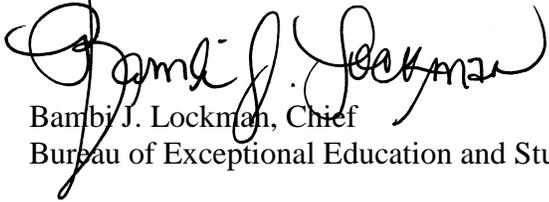
**BAMBI J. LOCKMAN**  
*Chief*

*Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services*

Mr. Mark A. Rains  
July 6, 2010  
Page Two

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Dixie 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, appearing to read "Bambi J. Lockman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "L".

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

Enclosure

cc: Ken Baumer  
Faith Hill  
Alexa Mills  
Kim C. Komisar  
Patricia Howell  
Vicki L. Eddy

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

**May 6–7, 2010**

**Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Florida Department of Education**



# Dixie County School District

## Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs May 6–7, 2010

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# **Dixie County School District**

## **On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs May 6–7, 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

### **SPP Indicator 1**

In accordance with 34 CFR §300.157(a)(3), each state must have established goals in effect for students with disabilities that address graduation rates. In addition, there are established performance indicators to assess progress toward achieving the established goals. SPP Indicator 1 relates to the percent of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma. In a letter dated December 11, 2009, the Dixie County School District superintendent was informed that the district was selected for a Level 3 on-site monitoring visit due to a pattern of poor performance over time regarding SPP Indicator 1.

### **On-Site Activities**

#### ***Monitoring Team***

On May 6–7, 2010, the following Bureau staff members conducted an on-site monitoring visit:

- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Joyce Lubbers, Program Director, Program Development and Services
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Derek Hemenway, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution

### ***Schools***

The following schools were selected for an on-site visit:

- Ruth Rains Middle School
- Dixie County High School

### ***Data Collection***

During the on-site visit, the monitoring activities included the following:

- District-level interviews – 3 participants
- School-level interviews – 11 participants
- Case studies – 8 students

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

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

- Current IEP
- Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)/behavioral intervention plan (BIP), if any
- Previous IEP
- Progress reports from current and past school year
- Report cards from current and past school year
- Discipline record
- Attendance record
- Student schedule

Information from each document was used to determine compliance with those standards most likely to impact a student's decision to remain in school and pursue a regular diploma.

## **Results**

The following results reflect the data collected through the activities of the on-site monitoring as well as commendations, concerns, recommendations, and findings of noncompliance.

### **Commendations**

Both of the schools visited are to be commended for the following:

- Calm, welcoming, and orderly school environment
- Faculty and school staff members demonstrate a high level of professionalism and commitment to the students
- Inviting climate and nurturing atmosphere that welcome parental involvement
- Focus on building relationships with students with disabilities who are at risk of dropping out and not graduating with a regular diploma
- Informal mentoring for students who are at risk of not graduating from high school with a regular diploma
- Knowledge of individual student needs demonstrated by ESE and general education teachers who were interviewed
- Positive attitude toward learning and active participation of students with disabilities in general education classes

- Provision of assignments to allow class work to be made up in a timely manner during and following out-of-school suspensions

The following commendations relate to Ruth Rains Middle School:

- Use of positive incentives, such as rewards for attendance and for displaying appropriate behaviors
- Low teacher turnover provides consistency for students
- Behavior plan implemented consistently by teachers offers positive incentives to students for good behavior
- Consistent contact with parents regarding students' attendance and discipline issues
- Principal's communication with the elementary school staff regarding the students' need for organizational skills

The following commendations relate to Dixie County High School:

- Wide range of vocational courses, including auto mechanics, welding, business classes, agriculture, and health-related classes
- Plans for principal visits to the community to offer educational topics stressing the importance of school attendance
- Consideration (for 2010–11) of positive incentives to encourage attendance
- Administrative interest in positive behavior support (PBS)
- Parent participation in the recruitment and hiring of a diversified teacher for science class
- Saturday school to make up missed class time in order to earn credit
- Computer Assisted Student Education (CASE) offered two days per week to allow students to make up a failing grade or increase their grade point average (GPA)
- Allowing students the opportunity to offset their record of absences with campus clean-up
- Florida Crown Workforce, a program for students with IEPs to work two afternoons per week, with pay, learning good work habits and receiving help with homework
- Participation of students with disabilities in advanced placement courses and dual enrollment
- Small group individual tutoring during the regular school day by teachers, reading coaches, and the media specialist
- After school tutoring two days per week offered for Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) remediation and American College Test (ACT) preparation
- Summer school for credit retrieval
- Take Stock in Children mentoring program

### **Concerns**

- Students who are required to take remediation courses, particularly in the upper grades, have little opportunity to take electives offered at the high school.
- School staff noted scheduling challenges in arranging for general education teachers to participate in IEP team meetings.
- Collaboration with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has been limited, possibly due to a previous misunderstanding by district staff that VR must be paid to be involved with the students.

- The Dixie County School District's *Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures* (SP&P) states that the district uses the FDOE's *Notice of Procedural Safeguards for Parents of Students with Disabilities*. The notice provided to parents in hardcopy is the FDOE notice. However, the notice posted on the district's website is the federal model form from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). This notice is not the most recent model form provided by USDOE and does not include the provision of revocation of parental consent for special education services.
- Staff report that graduation rate may be impacted by parental hesitation/concerns regarding their children leaving the community to attend college.
- District staff noted that the high school's in-school suspension program (ISS) is not a deterrent for students to skip school.

## Recommendations

- For students who require remediation, consider implementing other instructional strategies that provide remediation without excessive participation in remedial coursework. Examples may include:
  - Cross-curricular course scheduling (interdisciplinary instruction)
  - Intervention assistance with grouping based on student need for "quick" remediation of specific standards or goals
  - Courses implemented on a rotating schedule intended to maximize opportunities to master specific content
- Consider ways to address risk factors for students (regarding graduating with a regular diploma) beginning at the elementary school level by analyzing predictors such as: attendance, behavioral issues, and failing grades (particularly failing math and English before 6<sup>th</sup> grade).
- Consider a more organized mentoring program on the high school level to reach all students.
- Provide instruction and opportunities to demonstrate self-advocacy/self-determination beginning in middle and high school to include: students attending their IEP team meetings, learning about their need to self-identify, and being able to discuss their own interests and strengths.
- Post the most recent FDOE form for *Part B Notice of Procedural Safeguards for Parents of Students with Disabilities* on the district website.
- Increase opportunities for inclusion in general education classes through instructional strategies such as co-teaching.
- Consider ways to set higher expectations for students at the elementary school level by exposing the students to increased instructional rigor.
- Begin mentoring programs at the elementary school level when risk factors begin to emerge.
- Offer peer-to-peer mentoring in high school.
- Consider additional parent outreach regarding attendance issues on the high school level.
- Increase use of evidence-based practices such as:
  - Scheduling (cross-scheduling) teachers
  - Differentiated instruction
  - Use of technology (i.e., Smart boards) in teaching

- Revise the district's IEP form to clearly indicate that diploma options should be completed at the beginning of eighth grade or when the student turns 14, whichever occurs first.

## Findings of Noncompliance

Bureau staff identified noncompliance regarding progress reports in eight of eight student records.

The student's progress toward meeting the annual goals is to be measured and the report of progress is to be provided as often as progress is reported to the nondisabled population (34 CFR 300.320(a)(3)). For the four middle school case study students, progress toward meeting the annual goals was measured; however, there is no evidence that the report of progress was provided to the parents. For the four high school case study students, there is no evidence that progress toward meeting the annual goals was measured, nor evidence that a report of progress was provided to the parents.

In accordance with the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) guidance regarding findings that are identified through monitoring processes, within a given school district a finding of noncompliance is identified by the standard (i.e., regulation or requirement) that is violated, not by the number of times the standard is violated. Therefore, multiple incidents of noncompliance regarding a given standard that are identified through monitoring activities are reported as a single finding of noncompliance for that district. Noncompliance that is evident in  $\geq 25$  percent of records reviewed is considered systemic in nature. The finding of noncompliance found in the eight student records was systemic. Identifying information regarding the students was provided to the district prior to the dissemination of this report.

## Corrective Actions

1. Regarding the noncompliance identified for the four middle school students, the Dixie County School District was required to provide the parent(s) progress reports **no later than June 1, 2010**. In addition, the district has been informed of their requirement to provide targeted staff training to the middle school staff responsible for this procedure **no later than July 16, 2010**. Documentation of the provision of progress reports and the targeted staff training is to be provided to the Bureau **no later than July 26, 2010**.
2. Regarding the noncompliance identified for the four high school students, the Dixie County School District has been directed to reconvene the IEP teams **no later than July 16, 2010**, to address each student's progress toward the annual goals. In accordance with 34 CFR §300.324(a)(4) and the district's SP&P, the IEPs may be amended without convening an IEP team if the parent and the local education agency (LEA) agree to the amendment. Documentation of correction, including a copy of the revised IEP, must be provided to the Bureau **no later than July 23, 2010**. In addition, **no later than September 1, 2010**, training shall be provided to high school staff who are responsible for measuring student progress toward annual goals and reporting the progress to parents as specified on the IEP. Documentation regarding the targeted training to the school staff responsible for this procedure shall be provided to the Bureau **no later than September 8, 2010**.

3. **No later than September 1, 2010**, the Dixie County School District shall provide to the Bureau its plan to correct the systemic noncompliance related to measuring student progress and reporting to parents. The plan must include a sampling process to demonstrate compliance with the requirements and a timeline for implementation. Documentation of implementation and the results of the sampling process shall be provided to the Bureau **no later than February 10, 2011**.

## **Technical Assistance**

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding the percent of youths with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma can be found in the *Exceptional Student Education Compliance Self-Assessment: Processes and Procedures Manual 2009–10*. Information regarding differentiated instruction may be obtained by contacting the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) at (813) 558-5416. In addition, resources regarding SPP Indicators 1, 2, 13, and 14 may be found on the Bureau’s General Supervision website.

## **Bureau Contacts**

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

**ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance**  
(850) 245-0476

Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist  
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[Brenda.Fisher@fldoe.org](mailto:Brenda.Fisher@fldoe.org)

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Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist  
Dixie County School District’s  
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**Florida Department of Education  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

**Glossary of Acronyms**

ACT	American College Test
BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CASE	Computer Assisted Student Education
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
FBA	Functional behavioral assessment
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
F.S.	Florida Statutes
GPA	Grade point average
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
ISS	In-school suspension
LEA	Local education agency
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
PBS	Positive behavior support
SP&P	Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures
SPP	State Performance Plan
USDOE	United States Department of Education
VR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



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

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