

FINAL REPORT: FOCUSED MONITORING VERIFICATION
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

HENDRY COUNTY

JANUARY 18 - 20, 2005



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES

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June 3, 2005

Mr. Jeffrey Caulkins, Director
Exceptional Education and Student Services
Hendry County School District
P.O. Box 1980
LaBelle, Florida 33975

Dear Mr. Caulkins:

Thank you for your hospitality during our recent verification monitoring visit, January 18-20, 2005. During the visit, the district provided a comprehensive and well-prepared status report in response to the final monitoring report from the March 2003 focused monitoring visit. Visits to selected sites were conducted to verify information presented by the district. Bureau staff has reviewed additional information collected during the visit and a report of this visit is attached.

While the district has completed the strategies of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2003 monitoring visit, the district must submit a final status report related to this plan. In addition, the district will be required to revise its continuous improvement monitoring plans to incorporate the following findings from this visit:

- Gifted: services at the high school level
- Students with Disabilities: provision of consultative services
- Students with Disabilities: counseling as a related service, including psychological counseling

We appreciate your ongoing efforts on behalf of exceptional students. Please contact Dr. Kim Komisar, Program Director, at (850) 245-0476 or Suncom 205-0476 or via electronic mail at kim.komisar@fldoe.org if we can be of any further assistance to your district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bambi J. Lockman".

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

cc: Thomas Conner, Superintendent
Eileen L. Amy
Kim Komisar

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

**Final Report: Focused Monitoring Verification
Exceptional Student Education Programs
Hendry County**

January 18 - 20, 2005

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Final Report: Focused Monitoring Verification Exceptional Student Education Programs Hendry County

January 18 - 20, 2005

From January 18-20, 2005, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, conducted an on-site verification review of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs in Hendry County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting verification visits to districts previously monitored is to afford school districts an opportunity to offer validation of the activities they have undertaken through their system improvement plans. These visits provide an assurance to the Bureau that the strategies agreed to in the improvement plans are being implemented. They also give districts an opportunity to demonstrate progress, as well as for districts to request additional technical assistance regarding the implementation of their system improvement plans.

Hendry County was selected for focused monitoring in 2003 based on the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with a standard diploma. The district developed a system improvement plan (SIP) to address findings of noncompliance noted by the Bureau at that time. The results of the verification visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted March 17-19, 2003:

- access to the general curriculum
- decision-making process related to diploma option
- services to gifted students
- individual educational plans (IEPs)
- district forms

Additional areas addressed during this verification visit included:

- counseling as a related service, including psychological counseling
- speech and language services to students with communication needs

Site Visit

The primary on-site activity conducted as part of the verification monitoring visit was a demonstration by the district of the strategies implemented thus far through the SIP developed as result of the 2003 focused monitoring process. The components of the demonstration were determined by the district based on the areas targeted for improvement and the types of activities conducted by the district.

The demonstration by Hendry County included a presentation related to the implementation of strategies identified in the SIP based on categories from the final monitoring report. Written information outlining all district activities related to the SIP was prepared and presented to Bureau staff. Jeffrey Caulkins, Director, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), and Larry Worth, ESE Administrator, served as coordinators and points of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. Both Mr. Caulkins and Mr. Worth should be commended for a presentation that

was well prepared, and well executed; the written documentation verified the information presented orally.

In addition to the district presentation, the verification visit included site-visits to schools for the purpose of validating information provided during the district presentation and in the semi-annual reports submitted to the Bureau. Specific school visited were as follows:

- Westside Elementary School
- LaBelle Middle School
- LaBelle High School
- Clewiston High School

The visit included the following activities:

- 23 interviews with selected school and district staff
- reviews of 27 IEPs for students with disabilities
- reviews of nine matrix of services documents

Results

Access to the General Curriculum

This section includes information related to the way in which students with disabilities are provided access to the general curriculum, opportunities for remediation, and the effectiveness of instruction. Findings from the 2003 monitoring report in the area of access to the general curriculum were related to the provision of instruction based on individual needs of students with disabilities. The district provided documentation of trainings that were provided to teachers and staff in the areas of:

- curriculum development
- placement decisions
- inclusionary practices
- IEP development

Interviews with school staff verified attendance at these trainings. Administrators and staff indicated that these workshops have helped them write IEPs that more clearly target specific student needs; this in turn results in more effective decisions regarding access to the general curriculum and placement.

Westside Elementary is a full inclusion school except for one pre-kindergarten (pre-k) class that is self contained and five students who receive one to two hours of resource pull out in small group instruction per day. Four ESE certified teachers and seven paraprofessionals provide support to the general education teachers and students with disabilities throughout the school. In order to facilitate better communication each grade level has a 50-minute common planning period which includes the ESE teacher. Administration and staff reported that the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) has been instrumental in the implementation and success of the inclusion practices at this school. Although improved behavior and academic achievement are seen as outcomes of these inclusionary practices, it is felt by many that even greater gains could be made with added ESE teachers and paraprofessional staff.

LaBelle High School has begun an inclusion program for some of their 9th grade students. One ESE teacher and one general education teacher co-teach six periods a day. Both teachers report

they are better able to provide the accommodations and support needed for these students because they rely on each others expertise. There also is an ESE teacher who co-teaches classes with two general education teachers at LaBelle Middle School. At all schools visited, teachers and staff reported an increase in the number of ESE students enrolled in general education classes.

Hendry County School District has fulfilled the requirements of its SIP in this area. The district is encouraged to continue to expand its inclusionary practices at all grade levels, and to provide training to additional schools through FIN.

Decision-Making Process Related to Diploma Option

This section includes information related to making decisions about student's access to general education classrooms and standard diploma. The findings in the 2003 focused monitoring report indicated that placement decisions for students moving from the elementary to middle schools were not always IEP team decisions. Instead, since the IEPs included goals but not actual course enrollment, decisions about the type of course a student should enroll in (ESE or general education) often were made by guidance counselors and/or parents independently from the IEP team. In addition, it was determined that many middle school students were not given access to general education classes or curriculum until the eighth grade, and that special diploma students at Clewiston High School were not provided with opportunities to participate with nondisabled peers. The district has implemented the following strategies to address the decision-making process:

- articulation meetings, with representation from both sending and receiving schools, are held in the spring for students moving from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school
- inclusion model has been implemented in the sixth grade at Labelle Middle School
- reading and math labs have been implemented at Clewiston High School
- all students working towards a standard diploma at Clewiston High School are in general education courses with a learning strategies support class
- training of staff on the development of more effective and meaningful IEPs, including decisions regarding course of study, placement, and diploma option

Notable improvement is evident in the rate of students with disabilities graduating with a standard diploma. Hendry County was chosen for focused monitoring based on their 2001-02 graduation rate, which indicated that 23% of students with disabilities exited the district with a standard diploma. For the 2003-04 school year, 48% of students with disabilities graduated with a standard diploma, representing an increase of 25%.

Hendry County School District has met the requirements of its SIP in this area and is to be commended for its progress in this area. The district is encouraged to continue to implement and expand its efforts in this area.

Services to Gifted Students

This section includes information related to the provision of services to students identified as gifted, including content and service delivery options. Findings from the 2003 visit indicated that there was not a coordinated curriculum plan for gifted students across the district, and there were no gifted services for high school gifted students. A task force made up of one to three staff

members from each school has developed a curriculum plan; it is in the process of being implemented at the elementary and middle school levels.

At both Clewiston High and LaBelle High School gifted students are being served through advanced classes and dual enrollment; no direct services or consultation by gifted-endorsed teachers are provided. Administrators at LaBelle High School voiced the desire and willingness to expand gifted services at the school, and have requested information and assistance from the Bureau as well as the school district office regarding this process.

The district is encouraged to continue its efforts in implementing the coordinated curriculum across all grade levels. The district will be required to ensure that gifted students are provided the services they need at the high school level, and to incorporate this into its continuous improvement plan for gifted students.

Student Record Reviews

This section includes information related to the development of IEPs for students with disabilities. Systemic findings are those findings of noncompliance on a given element or component of the IEP that occurs in 25% or more of the records reviewed. Systemic findings of noncompliance in the 2003 final monitoring report were related to inadequacy or lack of the following elements:

- measurable goals
- documentation of the frequency of services, accommodations, and/or modifications
- present level of educational performance statements, annual goals, and short term objectives or benchmarks support the services on the IEP
- concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child
- documentation of the results of state- and/or district-wide testing

Strategies implemented by the district to address the area of student records include the following:

- revision of IEP forms
- training for all instructional personnel in the use of the new IEP forms

IEPs for 27 students were reviewed for compliance, with the focus being the elements noted above. There were no findings of noncompliance that resulted in a fund adjustment or the requirement that the IEP team reconvene to correct identified deficiencies, and there were no systemic findings of noncompliance. For six of the IEPs reviewed there was evidence in the present level of educational performance statement that a student had a significant need in a given area but there was no annual goal, short-term objective, or benchmark to address that area. This element of IEP development should continue to be an area of focus during staff training activities. The district should be commended for its progress in the area of IEP development.

In addition to IEP reviews, the Bureau conducted reviews of three matrix of services documents for students reported at the 254 or 255 funding level. Of those reviews, one was found to be inaccurately reported. The services identified on the matrix were not in evidence on the IEP or were not being provided to the student. The district will be required to correct the data for those students through the Automated Student Information System database for surveys 1 and 2 for the

2004-05 school year. The name and student number of the student for whom data must be corrected was provided to the district in a letter dated March 11, 2005.

Through staff interviews and student record reviews it was determined that ESE consultative services at the middle and high schools visited are provided by guidance counselors rather than ESE teachers. A check of these students' first semester grades indicated that a significant number of these students were failing at least one course; IEP team meetings had not recently been held to address the possible need for direct ESE services. The district will be required to review its procedures for providing consultative services to students with disabilities to ensure that services are provided by appropriately credentialed staff and that student performance is monitored to ensure progress. This must be incorporated into the district's continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities.

District Forms Review

Nine forms were found to require revision during the 2003 monitoring visit. All have been revised and submitted to the Bureau for review and approval.

Additional Compliance Areas: Counseling as a Related Service and Communication Needs

In addition to monitoring categories related to the 2003 final report, the Bureau also conducted interviews related to the provision of counseling as a related service, including psychological counseling, and the way in which communication needs are addressed for students with disabilities who are not eligible for the programs for students who are speech impaired or language impaired.

Counseling as a related service is provided either through the school guidance counselor or through referral to Glades/Hendry Mental Health services. While counseling was documented on some of the IEPs reviewed, several respondents indicated that it may not always be documented on the IEP for students whose IEP teams determine it is necessary. The district will be required to address this issue in its on-going IEP training and staff development.

Staff reported that communication goals are developed for students who need them, or that this area is incorporated into academic goals (e.g., language arts). It was reported that the speech/language pathologist is available to offer strategies and guidance in writing these goals. This was supported by the record reviews, and there were no findings of noncompliance in this area.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services conducted a verification monitoring visit to Hendry County District Schools from January 18-20, 2005. The visit served to verify that the district had adequately implemented the strategies of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in March 2003. District- and school-level staff should be commended for their efforts in all identified areas of concern, and for the increase in the proportion of students with disabilities graduating with a standard diploma. The district is encouraged to continue its efforts in the areas of access to the general curriculum through implementation of inclusionary practices.

The district is encouraged to ensure that all identified student needs are addressed through annual goals, objectives, or benchmarks, and that all necessary related services (e.g., counseling,

including psychological counseling) are documented on the IEP. These components should be addressed through the district's on-going staff training on IEP development.

There are two areas which must be addressed through the district's continuous improvement plans for students with disabilities and for gifted students. The continuous improvement plans must be revised to incorporate:

- gifted services at the high school level
- provision of consultative services to students with disabilities

The district presentation by Jeffrey Caulkins and Larry Worth and the on-site record reviews and interviews conducted by Bureau staff provided evidence of improvement in all areas of concern identified during the 2003 monitoring visit. While the district has completed the strategies of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2003 monitoring report, a final status report related to this plan must be submitted in May 2005. The revisions to the continuous improvement plans described above will serve to ensure that the district will continue to meet the requirements of the provision of services to exceptional students.