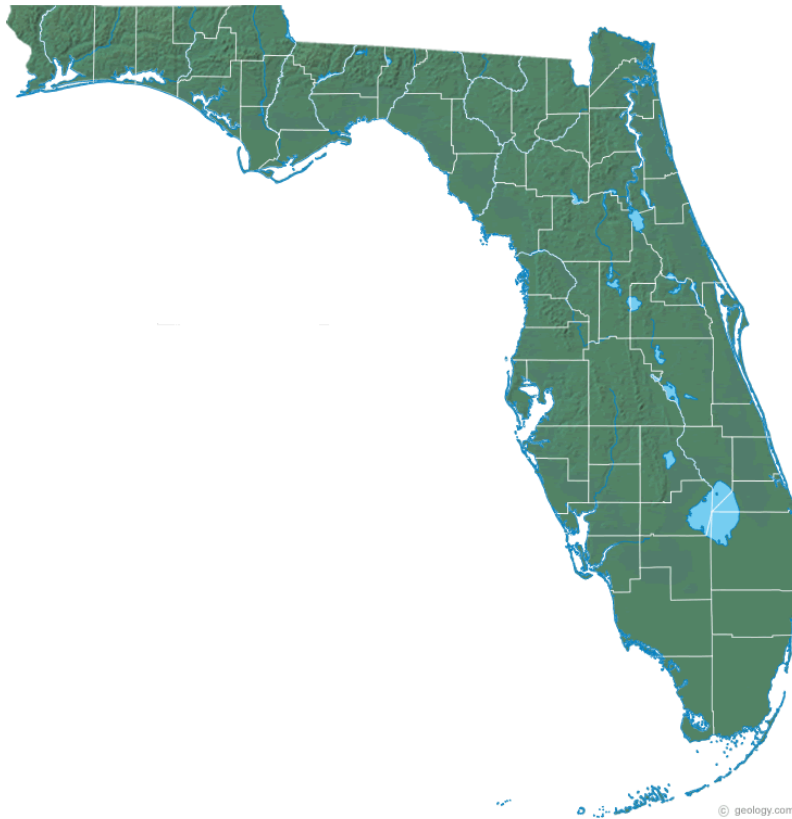


# Osceola County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring

Exceptional Student Education Programs

October 5–8, 2009



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Florida Department of Education

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December 1, 2009

Dr. Michael A. Grego, Superintendent  
Osceola County School District  
817 Bill Beck Boulevard  
Kissimmee, Florida 34744

Dear Superintendent Grego:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report of On-Site Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Programs* for Osceola County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to our visit on October 5–8, 2009, including student record reviews, interviews with school and district staff, and classroom observations. The final report will be placed on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services' Web site and may be viewed at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp>.

The Osceola County School District was selected for an on-site monitoring visit due to the number of students reported for weighted funding through the Florida Education Finance Program. Specifically, the district's rate for students reported at the 254 cost factor was 200 percent or more than the state rate for the 2008 Survey 3. Ms. Penny Collins, ESE Director, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and the on-site monitoring. In addition, Bureau staff members were welcomed and assisted by the principals and other staff at all of the schools that were visited. The Bureau's on-site monitoring activities identified discrepancies that require corrective action.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Osceola 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".

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

Enclosure

cc: Penny Collins                      Kim C. Komisar  
     Patricia Howell                     Jill Snelson

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

**Osceola County School District  
Final Report: On-Site Focused Monitoring**

**October 5–8, 2009**

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



# Osceola County School District

## Final Report: On-Site Monitoring October 5–8, 2009

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# Osceola County School District

## On-Site Focused Monitoring October 5–8, 2009

### Final Report

#### Authority

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 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 ss. 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 in operating 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)], and districts are required to make a good faith effort to assist children with disabilities to achieve their stated goals and objectives in the least restrictive environment. In accordance with IDEA, the Department 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 the Department'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 2008-09 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.

Decisions regarding the components of Level 1 and Level 2 monitoring for 2008-09 were driven by the following: issues raised in recent Office of Program Policy and Governmental Accountability (OPPAGA) reports and legislative action regarding gifted education and matrix of services; issues addressed during the on-site monitoring of Florida's ESE programs by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); and the requirements of the SPP/Annual Performance Report (APR).



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 activities and Level 2 activities as applicable. Preliminary selection of districts for consideration for Level 3 monitoring was based on the following, and resulted in the identification of 22 districts:

- >150 percent of the state rate for students reported at the 254 and 255 **matrix** levels (state rate for 254: 4.84 percent; 255: 2.08 percent; 254/255 combined: 6.92 percent)
- >150 percent of the state rate for formal requests for **dispute resolution** (state rate: 0.12 percent)
- **Correction of noncompliance** not completed within the required timeline (one year from identification)

On-site monitoring was reserved for those situations that require classroom observations or staff interviews, and for those that cannot be adequately addressed through student record desk reviews (e.g., individual educational plan [IEP] implementation; services being provided in accordance with the matrix). The list of 22 districts was further narrowed by raising the limit for the matrix of services to 200 percent of the state rate, and consideration was given to any districts that met the criteria for selection in more than one area (i.e., matrix, dispute resolution, and correction of noncompliance).

In a letter dated March 6, 2009, the Osceola County School District superintendent was informed that the Bureau would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit related to the district's ESE programs, specifically related to reporting students at the 254 matrix level at 200 percent or more of the state rate.

### **Matrix of Services**

Section 1011.62(1)(e), F.S., describes the State of Florida's funding model for exceptional student education programs using basic, at-risk, support levels IV and V for exceptional students, and career Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) 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 checked on the matrix. 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.

Within the matrix, five domains are used to group the types of services, and five levels are used to describe the nature and intensity of services within each domain. The total number of points is determined by adding together the scores for each domain and applicable special considerations and results in a rating of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5. In order to generate funds

at weighted cost factors of 254 or 255, a matrix of services must be completed at least once every three years by personnel who have received approved training. School districts must ensure that each matrix of services document reflects the student's current services. If services change as a result of an IEP team decision, a new matrix of services document must be completed. If services do not change as a result of an IEP team meeting, and the matrix is less than three years old, the existing document may be reviewed and remain in effect. Matrix of services documents are required for McKay Scholarship students at all cost factor levels and may be completed for students with disabilities receiving services above Level 1 in Department of Juvenile Justice facilities and charter schools.

## **On-Site Activities**

### ***Monitoring Team***

On October 5–8, 2009, the following Bureau staff members conducted an on-site monitoring visit to review the matrix of services documents for students with disabilities enrolled in Osceola County who are currently reported for the 254 or 255 cost factors:

- Jill Snelson, Program Specialist (Team Leader)
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist
- Annette Oliver, Program Specialist

### ***Schools***

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

- Kissimmee Elementary School
- Horizon Middle School
- Parkway Middle School
- Gateway High School
- New Beginnings Education Center
- Osceola Regional Juvenile Commitment Facility

IEPs and matrix of services documents from Highlands Elementary School also were reviewed.

### ***Data Collection***

Monitoring activities included the following:

- District-level interviews – 5
- School-level interviews – 9
- Record reviews – 40
  - IEPs
  - Matrixes of Services
  - Supporting documentation
- Classroom observations – 30
- Case studies – 30

## Results

The information reported here includes data collected through the activities of the on-site monitoring as well as the review of Osceola County School District matrix of services documents and supporting documentation. Following this record review and the completion of on-site monitoring activities, the Bureau noted the following:

1. The atmosphere of most schools visited was overwhelmingly positive, with evidence of positive behavioral interventions and supports.
2. The district population, including students and staff, is very transient; as a result, updated training is challenging.
3. It is evident that the district tries to provide the appropriate level of services for this student population.
  - The majority of students were actively engaged in class work assignments. Both teachers and aides were observed working directly with the students.
  - ESE students participated in activities with general education students.
4. The following concerns were identified:
  - During the preliminary interview, the district noted that ESE procedures were under review in New Beginnings Education Center. Some staff members demonstrated limited knowledge of the matrix and its relationship to the content of the IEP. Training and technical assistance will be provided by the district to address any identified areas of concern.
  - The Resource Compliance Specialist (RCS) completes the matrix of services form based on input from the teachers and the content of the IEPs. They are also responsible for the final compliance check. If the RCS is not familiar with the classroom or the student, this practice can result in a discrepancy between the services actually being provided and the information recorded on the matrix document.
5. Findings of noncompliance included the following:
  - Parkway Middle School
    - The two students observed and an additional student who was absent during the on-site visit were reported at a Level 5 in Domain A, which requires *evidence of a continuous 3:1 ratio that is intentional and maintained for a specific student*. This student-to-teacher ratio was not evident during the on-site visit.
    - The district acknowledged the discrepancy and has hired another paraprofessional since the observation. Documentation was provided to the Bureau to verify this correction. No further corrective action or documentation is required.
  - Osceola Juvenile Commitment Center
    - The four students observed were rated at a Level 5 in Domain C, which requires *documentation of student behavior that indicates a pattern of regular outbursts or self-injurious behavior; and evidence of a plan for supervision for more than 50 percent of the school day and staff allocated to provide that service*.
    - The four students also were rated at Level 5, Domain B, which requires *evidence of contracted mental health professionals working full-time with teachers in a classroom setting to provide services to students with social/emotional needs. All aspects of the program must be planned collaboratively*.
    - The supervision and mental health portions of this program are provided to all students in the facility, both ESE and nondisabled, through a contract between the

Department of Juvenile Justice and Three Springs Adolescent Treatment Programs. Therefore, these services should not be reflected on the matrix of services form as they are not funded by the school district.

- These students' matrix documents should be revised to reflect a cost factor of 253.
- New Beginnings Education Center
  - One student observed was not receiving speech/language therapy as indicated on the matrix. The district acknowledged the discrepancy and reported experiencing difficulty retaining staff members, particularly speech-language pathologists.
  - Subsequent to the on-site visit, the district assigned a speech/language therapist to New Beginnings. The records for all students at the school scheduled to receive speech or language therapy have been reviewed by district staff. Services required in accordance with the students' IEPs as well as compensatory services are now being provided.

### **Corrective Actions**

1. No later than December 18, 2009, the Osceola County School District shall correct the funding level within the Automated Student Information System database for the students attending the Osceola Juvenile Commitment Center whose matrix documents reflect Level 5 for Domains B and C. Documentation of the correction, including a copy of the revised matrix documents and evidence of the data correction must be provided.
2. No later than March 31, 2010, the Osceola County School District shall provide documentation that the students at New Beginnings Education Center who had not received speech/language services as specified on their IEPs have been provided compensatory services.

## Technical Assistance

The following resources are designed to provide technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding matrix requirements:

### Publications

The following documents are available through the Bureau's Clearinghouse:

- <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/matrixnu.pdf> *Use of the Exceptional Student Education Matrix of Services*
- *Exceptional Student Education/Florida Education Finance Program (ESE/FEFP) Matrix of Services Handbook 2004*. Publication 309010B

The following is a partial list of Bureau staff available for future technical assistance in the completion or review of matrix of services documents:

### ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance

(850) 245-0476

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Osceola County School District's

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**Appendix:**

**Glossary of Acronyms**



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

**Glossary of Acronyms**

APR	Annual Performance Report
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
FEFP	Florida Education Finance Program
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
OPPAGA	Office of Program Policy and Governmental Accountability
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
SPP	State Performance Plan





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

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