

FINAL REPORT OF FOCUSED MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

POLK COUNTY

MARCH 18 - 22, 2002



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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May 30, 2003

Mr. Jim Thornhill, Superintendent
Polk County School District
1915 S. Floral Avenue
Bartow, Florida 33830

Dear Superintendent Thornhill:

We are pleased to provide you with the Final Report of Focused Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs in Polk County. The report from our visit on March 18-22, 2002, includes the system improvement plan proposed by your staff.

An update of outcomes achieved and/or a summary of related activities, as identified in your district's system improvement plan, must be submitted by June 30 and December 30 of each school year for the next two years, unless otherwise noted on the improvement plan.

If my staff can be of any assistance as you continue to implement the system improvement plan, please contact Eileen L. Amy, ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance Administrator. Mrs. Amy may be reached at 850/245-0476, or via electronic mail at Eileen.Amy@fldoe.org.

Thank you for your continuing commitment to improve services for exceptional education students in Polk County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shan Goff".

Shan Goff, Chief
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services

Enclosure

cc: Frank J. O'Reilly, School Board Chairman
Members of the School Board
C. Wesley Bridges II, School Board Attorney
Sherwin Holmes, ESE Director
School Principals
Jim Warford, Chancellor

SHAN GOFF
Chief
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services

Polk County Monitoring Report
Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Monitoring Process	4
Authority	4
Method	4
Focused Monitoring	4
Key Data Indicators.....	5
District Selection.....	5
On-Site Monitoring Activities.....	5
Off-Site Monitoring Activities.....	6
Parent Surveys	6
Teacher Surveys	6
Student Surveys	6
Reviews of Student Records and District Forms	6
Reporting Process.....	7
Exit Conference.....	7
Preliminary Report	7
Final Report.....	7
Background	8
Demographic Information.....	8
Reporting of Information.....	10
Sources of Information.....	10
Surveys, Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, Case Studies, and Classroom Visits	11
Staff Training and Knowledge	11
Student Attendance	11
Dropout Prevention Strategies	13
Least Restrictive Environment.....	16
Behavior/Discipline.....	17
Curriculum.....	19
Assessment.....	21
Post-School Transition.....	23
Stakeholder Opinions Related to the Trigger.....	25
Student Record and District Form Reviews.....	27
Student Record Reviews	27
District Forms Review	29
Summary	30
System Improvement Plan.....	31
Appendix A: Survey Results.....	41
Parent Survey Results.....	42
Teacher Survey Results.....	45
Student Survey Results.....	48
Appendix B: ESE Monitoring Team Members.....	51
Appendix C: Glossary of Acronyms	53
Appendix D: Forms Review.....	55

**Polk County School District
Focused Monitoring Visit
March 18-22, 2002**

Executive Summary

During the week of March 18-22, 2002, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, conducted an on-site review of the exceptional student education programs in Polk County Public Schools. In its continuing efforts to focus the monitoring process on student educational outcomes, the Bureau identified four key data indicators or “triggers.” Polk County was selected for monitoring on the basis of its high dropout rate for students with disabilities. The results of the monitoring process are reported under ten categories or related areas that are considered to impact or contribute to the trigger.

Summary of Findings

Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, Case Studies, and Classroom Visits

Staff Training and Knowledge

Staff training and knowledge opportunities are available for staff in Polk County. While training opportunities that directly targeted dropout prevention for students with disabilities were not reported, training is provided in strategies believed to be associated with dropout prevention. There is a need for continued training of teachers in skill areas related to effectively providing instruction for all students, including the use of instructional accommodations.

Student Attendance

District policies and procedures for tracking attendance and for allowing students to make-up missed work are not consistently understood or implemented across the district. In addition, while individual teachers make significant efforts to encourage student attendance, many of the attendance-related interventions in evidence across the district focused on implementing consequences for absences rather than proactively promoting attendance. There is concern that a proposed decrease in the number of attendance assistance positions will negatively impact student attendance.

Dropout Prevention Strategies

A major area of concern regarding dropout prevention is the limited availability of vocational classes for students with disabilities. In addition, while a variety of activities are reported by individual teachers or schools, there is a lack of a coordinated district-wide dropout tracking system or prevention initiative. This results in fragmented individual services and activities, which in turn causes duplication of services or gaps in needed services. Finally, individual educational plans (IEPs) do not address factors

related to helping students with disabilities, who are at-risk for dropping out, stay in school.

Least Restrictive Environment

While the district appears to provide a full range of placement options for students with disabilities, there is concern that some students with disabilities are segregated from their nondisabled peers during the school day. Of particular concern is the scheduling of lunch and/or electives only with other students with disabilities. Opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their nondisabled peers need to be increased.

Behavior/Discipline

There is inconsistent implementation of functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) for students with disabilities, and some confusion regarding district policies related to these. In addition, the reactive nature of the discipline policy administered by the Office of Discipline may not promote the use of positive behavioral supports for both ESE and nondisabled students. In many schools, there is a need for a consistent comprehensive school-wide discipline plan, with clearly defined student expectancies, consequences for meeting or failing to meet those expectancies, consistent application of behavior management techniques within and between classrooms, and a structured array of in-school interventions that employ positive behavioral supports.

Curriculum

The results of the interviews with district and school staff, the case studies, and the classroom observations revealed that many individuals confused educational setting (e.g., regular classroom) with access to the general education curriculum. In addition, it was evident that instructional accommodations are not provided consistently to students with disabilities. It was also determined that access to career development and vocational education is limited for students with disabilities. Students who are interested in pursuing vocational education at Traviss Technical Center must meet a minimum academic requirement or score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Many students with disabilities do not meet that requirement and cannot participate in the program leaving few other vocational alternatives for them to pursue.

Assessment

There is a district-wide emphasis on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) preparation. The district encourages students with disabilities to take the FCAT, including the use of accommodations. However, as students progress through school, the belief by parents and teachers that students with disabilities will pass the FCAT and get a standard diploma decreases. IEP team decisions regarding diploma options are impacted by FCAT performance. Analyses of FCAT and routine assessment results are not generally tied in with sequential planning for instruction for students with disabilities.

Post-School Transition

The post-school transition options available to all students, including those with disabilities, do not appear to be the result of a coordinated endeavor by the District.

Instead, specific schools are making some effort, but the programs vary from school to school. The lack of coordination may be a result of the reported lack of communication between the vocational education and exceptional student education departments. This lack of coordination has resulted in a limited array of vocational and on-the-job training (OJT) services for students with disabilities district-wide.

Stakeholder Opinions Related to the Trigger

The most frequently cited contributor to the high dropout rate in Polk County is the need for more comprehensive vocational education programs for all students. In addition, there is a need to provide more intensive and effective instruction designed to remediate student deficits in the basic academic skill areas of reading and math, thus increasing the likelihood that students with disabilities will be able to obtain a standard diploma.

Record and Forms Reviews

During the formal record reviews carried out as a part of the standard focused monitoring procedures, individual findings for student records were noted in 13 areas. In addition, two areas of non-compliance appeared to be systemic in nature. The first was related to the reporting of initiation and duration dates of services, and the second was related to the development of meaningful and measurable goals and objectives.

In addition, through the case study process, a pattern of noncompliance was revealed regarding the timeliness of IEPs and reevaluations for students with disabilities and educational plans (EPs) for students identified as gifted. Due to the nature and significance of the finding, it was addressed under separate cover prior to the district's receipt of the preliminary monitoring report. A funding adjustment was applied for 66 IEPs found to be not current during the course of this additional inquiry.

During the forms review, findings were cited on the *Notification of Change of Placement (and FAPE)*, the *Informed Notice of Dismissal*, and the *Annual Notice of Confidentiality* forms. Changes are required for the next printing on the *Notice and Consent for Initial Placement*, *Documentation of Staffing/Eligibility Determination*, and the *Notice: Not Eligible for Exceptional Student Placement* forms.

System Improvement Strategies Plan

In response to these findings, the district is required to develop a system improvement strategies plan for submission to the Bureau. These strategies must include activities and strategies intended to address specific findings, as well as measurable indicators of change. In developing the system improvement strategies plan, every effort should be made to link the system improvement activities resulting from this focused monitoring report to the district's continuous improvement monitoring plan. The format for the system improvement strategies plan, including a listing of the critical issues identified by the Bureau as most significantly in need of improvement, is provided at the end of this report.

Monitoring Process

Authority

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, in carrying out its roles of leadership, resource allocation, technical assistance, monitoring, and evaluation is required to: examine and evaluate procedures, records, and programs of exceptional student education programs; provide information and assistance to school districts; and, otherwise assist school districts in operating effectively and efficiently (Section 229.565, Florida Statutes). In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Department is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of IDEA are carried out, and that each educational program for children with disabilities administered in the state, meets the educational requirements of the state (Section 300.600(a)(1) and (2) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations).

The monitoring system established to oversee exceptional student education (ESE) programs reflects the Department's commitment to provide assistance and service to school districts. The system is designed to emphasize improved outcomes and educational benefits for students while continuing to conduct those activities necessary to ensure compliance with applicable federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. The system provides consistency with other state efforts, including the State Improvement Plan required by the IDEA.

Method

With guidance from a work group charged with the responsibility of recommending revisions to the Bureau's monitoring system, substantial revisions to the Bureau's monitoring practices were initiated during the 2000-01 school year. Three types of monitoring processes were established as part of the system of monitoring and oversight. Those monitoring processes are identified as follows:

- focused monitoring
- continuous improvement/self assessment monitoring
- random monitoring

During the 2000-01 school year, the Bureau developed and piloted activities for focused monitoring in four districts, examining programs and services for students with disabilities and students identified as gifted. Based on staff and peer monitor feedback, along with further suggestions from the work group, the focused monitoring procedures were further developed and/or revised. It was also determined that the focused monitoring activities will examine only programs and services for students with disabilities.

Focused Monitoring

The purpose of the focused monitoring process is to implement a methodology that targets the Bureau's monitoring intervention on key data indicators ("triggers") that were

identified as significant for educational outcomes for students. Through this process, the Bureau will use such data to inform the monitoring process, thereby, implementing a strategic approach to intervention and commitment of resources that will improve student outcomes.

Key Data Indicators

Beginning in the 2000-01 school year, the following key data indicators (“triggers”) were recommended by the monitoring restructuring work group and were adopted for implementation by the Bureau. The triggers and their sources of data are

- percentage of students with disabilities participating in regular classes (i.e., spending at least 80% of the school day with their nondisabled peers) [Data source: Survey 9]
- dropout rate for students with disabilities [Data source: Survey 5]
- percentage of students with disabilities exiting with a standard diploma [Data source: Survey 5]
- participation in statewide assessments by students with disabilities [Data sources: performance data from the assessment files and Survey 3 enrollment data].

It is anticipated that these triggers will continue to inform the Bureau’s focused monitoring process over a period of several years.

District Selection

Polk County School District was selected to be monitored based on a review of data from the 2000-01 school year that was submitted electronically to the Department of Education (DOE) Information Database for Surveys 2, 3, 5, 9, and from the assessment files. The district was selected due to its having the third highest percentage of students with disabilities dropping out of school when all the districts in the state were rank ordered from highest to lowest. In addition, there was an increase in the number of students with disabilities who dropped out of school from the previous year.

On-Site Monitoring Activities

The on-site monitoring visit occurred during the week of March 18, 2002. The on-site activities were conducted by a team composed of four DOE staff, two individuals under contract, four University of Miami research staff, and six peer monitors. Peer monitors are exceptional student education personnel from other districts who were trained to assist with the DOE’s monitoring activities. On-site monitoring activities consisted of

- interviews with district and school level staff to gather information about the dropout trigger from multiple sources offering different points of view
- focus groups with parents, students, and teachers to provide a more in-depth perspective about the dropout trigger
- student case studies involving classroom visits and parent phone calls to investigate classroom practices and interventions that might contribute to whether or not an individual student becomes at-risk for dropping out of school

Prior to the on-site visit, Bureau staff notified district staff of the selection of the following schools to be visited based on data related to the dropout rate: Medulla Elementary School, Crystal Lake Middle School, Westwood Middle School, Lake Alfred Discovery Middle School, Auburndale High School, Bartow High School, Haines City High School, Kathleen High School, and Maynard A. Traviss Technical Center. The on-site selection of students for the case studies was based on criteria that have been identified as being historically characteristic of students who drop out of school. Schools were asked to provide a listing of students who were

- identified as severely emotionally disturbed (SED), emotionally handicapped (EH), and/or specific learning disabled (SLD)
- overage for grade
- identified as having a high absentee rate
- identified as being at-risk for dropping out of school based on other concerns

Off-Site Monitoring Activities

Surveys were designed by the University of Miami research staff in order to provide maximum opportunity for input from parents of students with disabilities, ESE and regular education teachers, and students with disabilities in grades 9-12. Results of the surveys will be discussed in the body of this report. Data from each of the surveys are included as appendix A.

Parent Surveys

Surveys were mailed to 12,348 parents of students with disabilities, with 1,869, or 15%, of the parents responding. The survey that was sent to parents was printed in both English and Spanish, and included a cover letter and postage paid reply envelope.

Teacher Surveys

Surveys were provided to 5,232 teachers. Of those, 689 were returned from 26 different schools, representing 13% of the sample.

Student Surveys

A sufficient number of surveys was provided to allow all students with disabilities, grades 9-12, to respond. For each class or group of students, a teacher conducted the student survey following a written script. Of the 3,624 surveys sent, 239 were received from 6 schools, representing 7% of the sample. Since participation in this survey was not appropriate for some students whose disabilities might impair their understanding of the survey, professional judgement was used to determine appropriate participants.

Reviews of Student Records and District Forms

At the DOE, Bureau staff members conducted a compliance review of student records that were randomly selected from the population of students with disabilities prior to the on-site monitoring visit. In addition, Bureau staff reviewed selected district forms and notices to determine if the required components were included.

During the course of the focused monitoring visit, a pattern of noncompliance was revealed regarding the timeliness of IEPs and reevaluations for students with disabilities and EPs for students identified as gifted. As a result, additional records from three high schools were reviewed. The results of these reviews of student records and forms will be described in this report.

Reporting Process

Exit Conference

On the last day of the monitoring visit, a meeting was held with the district ESE administrator and district staff. Preliminary findings and concerns were shared at this time.

Preliminary Report

Following the on-site visit, Bureau staff prepares a preliminary written report. The preliminary report is sent to the district, and Bureau program specialists are assigned to assist the district in developing appropriate system improvements for necessary areas. Data for the report are compiled from sources that have been previously discussed in this document, including the following:

- LEA profile
- parent, teacher, and student surveys
- reviews of student records
- reviews of forms
- parent, teacher, and student focus groups
- case studies, including corresponding parent phone calls
- classroom visits
- interview with district and school staff

The report is developed to include the following elements: a description of the monitoring process, background information specific to the district, reported information from monitoring activities, and a summary. Appropriate appendices with data specific to the district accompany each report.

Final Report

In completing the system improvement section of the report, every effort should be made to link the system improvement activities for focused monitoring to the district's continuous improvement monitoring plan. In collaboration with Bureau staff, the district is encouraged to develop methods that correlate activities in order to utilize resources, staff, and time in an efficient manner in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Within 30 days of the district's receipt of the preliminary report, a separate appendix that contains the district's system improvement section, including strategies and activities targeting specific findings, will be submitted to the Bureau for review. Within 30 days of the Bureau's review, a final report including the system improvement strategies plan will be released.

Background

Demographic Information

The data contained in this section of the report is a summary of the data presented in the annual data profile provided to each district. Each element is reported over a period of three years and is presented with comparison data from the state and enrollment group for the district. Profiles are available from the Bureau and from individual districts upon request.

Polk County School District has a total school population (PK-12) of 81,163 with 12,174 (15%) being identified as students with disabilities and 3,247 (4%) as gifted. Polk County is considered a “large” district and is one of 7 districts in this enrollment group. Of the total Polk County School District population, 62% are White, 23% are Black, and 13% are Hispanic. Of the students with disabilities, 58% are White, 30% are Black, and 11% are Hispanic. Fifty-two percent of the district’s population is eligible for free/reduced lunch.

Polk County School District is comprised of 64 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, 16 high schools, two alternative centers, one ESE center, and one technical institute/vocational school.

According to the 2000-01 data, 7% of Polk County’s students with disabilities were reported as dropping out of school as compared to 5% for districts of similar enrollment and 5% for the State’s average. Data indicated an increase (1999-00 to 2000-01) of the dropout rate for students with disabilities while the percent for all students remained the same over that same time span. In addition, the retention rate in Polk County is higher than its enrollment group and statewide for both student populations.

The data also indicate that the proportion of students with disabilities in Polk County who graduate with a standard diploma is significantly lower than the proportion in other districts of similar size or in the state as a whole. Twenty-eight percent of students with disabilities in Polk County graduate with a standard diploma, compared to 54% and 51% in similar enrollment districts and the state, respectively.

Polk County reports that 39% of its students with disabilities (ages 6-21) spend 80% or more of their school week with their nondisabled peers. This rate is lower than both the State rate of 48% and the similar enrollment group rate of 49%.

The data also indicate a higher in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension rate for students with disabilities than their nondisabled peers for the 2000-01 school year. There was no significant difference between Polk County’s suspension rates and that of districts of similar enrollment and the State. Through the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Plan procedures, Polk County identified discipline rate as its area of focus for students with disabilities.

Additionally, Polk County was reported to have the second highest number of students in Department of Juvenile Justice facilities in the State. It was noted, however, that students from other districts are placed in Polk facilities.

A review of the data related to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) indicates that the participation rate for students with disabilities has increased steadily from the 1998-99 school year through the 2000-01 school year, in both reading and math across all grade levels reported. In addition, the percentage of students with disabilities who scored at level three or above increased between the 1999-00 and 2000-01 school years. This increase was evident in both reading and math at all grades reported, with the exception of grade four reading.

Reporting of Information

Sources of Information

Data for this report are compiled from a variety of sources accessed before and during the on-site visit. This data includes

- compliance review of eight student records
- compliance review of an additional 136 student records from three high schools resulting from an on-site finding of noncompliance
- review of district forms
- surveys returned by 1,869 parents
- surveys returned by 689 teachers representing 26 schools
- surveys completed by 239 students from six schools
- two focus groups with 17 parents representing 17 students with disabilities from elementary to high school level
- one focus group interview with 11 school personnel representing grades one through twelve (seven teachers, two facilitators, one transition specialist, and one counselor)
- four student focus groups with two groups of students preparing for a special diploma (12 students at Lakeland High School and three at Bartow High School) and two groups of students preparing for a standard diploma (15 students at Lakeland High School and nine at Bartow High School)
- 97 individual district and building level staff interviews
- 16 case studies including, three corresponding parent phone calls
- 40 classroom visits at the nine schools visited.

The data generated through the surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, case studies, and classroom visits are summarized in this report on page 11, while the results from the review of student records and district forms are presented beginning on page 26 of the report. This report provides conclusions with regard to the dropout trigger and specifically addresses related areas that may contribute to or impact the trigger. These areas include

- staff knowledge and training
- school attendance
- dropout prevention strategies
- integration of students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers
- behavior/discipline
- curriculum
- assessment
- post-school transition services
- stakeholder opinions related to the trigger

To the extent possible, this report focuses on systemic issues rather than on isolated instances of noncompliance or need for improvement. Systemic issues are those that

occur at a sufficient enough frequency that the monitoring team could reasonably infer a system-wide problem. Findings are presented in a preliminary report, and the district has the opportunity to clarify items of concern. In a collaborative effort between the district and Bureau staff, system improvement areas are identified. Findings are addressed through the development of strategies for improvement, and evidence of change will be identified as a joint effort between the district and the Bureau.

Surveys, Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, Case Studies, and Classroom Visits

Staff Training and Knowledge

Although the district did not report a coordinated effort to target students with disabilities schools at with high dropout rate, it was noted through the interview process that some school staff received training on disciplining ESE students, communicating with parents, functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans, attendance procedures, and strategies to keep students from dropping out of school. These topics all relate to student dropout rate.

Focus groups with parents and teachers indicated concern about two areas of teacher preparation. The teachers indicated the need for vocational education teachers to be better prepared to work with students with disabilities. “The problem is that most vocational education instructors come from industry and do not have an education background.” The parents indicated the need for training regular education teachers on how to provide accommodations.

In summary, staff training and knowledge opportunities are available for staff in Polk County. While training opportunities that directly targeted dropout prevention for students with disabilities were not reported, training is provided in strategies believed to be associated with dropout prevention. There is a need for continued training of teachers in skill areas related to effectively providing instruction for all students, including the use of instructional accommodations.

Student Attendance

The review of the attendance data (Florida School Indicators Report) indicated a higher absentee rate of students with disabilities than their regular education peers in the majority of elementary and middle schools in the district and in all the high schools.

According to the Director of Student Services, the district’s truancy policy addresses those students who have at least 15 unexcused absences within a 90 day period. Procedures include a conference at the school with the family, student, and school officials to discuss issues related to the truancy. If the conference does not help to decrease the absences, a referral is made to Youth and Family Alternative (a contracted agency). For extreme truancy cases, the Superintendent can file an injunction with the court. Interviews with school-based staff revealed inconsistent understanding of the district’s truancy policy.

The interview process with district and school staff yielded inconsistent responses related to attendance policy and procedures. District staff reported that the same attendance policy, with the exception of withdrawal for nonattendance, is implemented for ESE students in the district as for their nondisabled peers. However, this was not always supported through interviews with school-based staff. It was reported that Auburndale High School implements two systems for tracking absentee rate, one for students with disabilities working toward a standard diploma and another for special diploma students. The district also reported that it does not track attendance rate, but that this is done at the school level.

According to district level staff, there is an unwritten policy that does not allow for full-time ESE students to be withdrawn for non-attendance. They remain on the rolls unless the students withdraw themselves. For ESE students in regular classes, the same withdrawal procedures implemented for their nondisabled peers are implemented.

Each school was reported to have its own internal procedures for following up on students who are absent. When teachers were asked to verbalize the procedures implemented at their respective schools for students who were absent, inconsistent responses were given. There was confusion about the number of days students are out of school before parents are contacted, the person(s) who track absences at a school, and the types of follow-up activities that should be implemented when students are absent. Both district and school level staff indicated that attendance assistants are often utilized to intervene and provide follow-up with chronic absentees. The Director of Student Services reported that the number of attendance assistant positions is expected to decrease by six in the coming school year, leaving only seven assistants to cover the entire district.

Through the interview and classroom visit processes, it was evident that teachers routinely maintain records of student attendance. It was reported that individual student attendance information is frequently addressed during staffing meetings, and that student attendance is taken into account when making educational decisions such as placement in a vocational technology program. During telephone interviews with the parents of case study students, it was noted that parents received either a phone call or written correspondence from the school when their child was absent, indicating that some follow-up activities are implemented.

The results of interviews, case studies, and classroom visits provided only limited information about innovative strategies and interventions implemented to encourage students to attend school. It was reported that school based staff do not routinely provide students who are absent with opportunities to make up missed work. At Kathleen High School, however, one teacher was noted to employ a behavior management system to motivate a student to attend school. Of particular concern were some case studies in which students were identified as having a high absentee rate, yet no strategies were identified or implemented to address the problem.

Through the focus group interview process, some teachers reported that the truancy procedures implemented for ESE students were too lenient. Teachers perceived that it

was unfair to allow ESE students to miss a significant number of days in a single grading period, and be allowed to make up the work with no consequences. An example was given of a student who had missed 43 days in a 45-day grading period, and was allowed to submit make-up work.

In summary, district policies and procedures for tracking attendance and for allowing students to make-up missed work are not consistently understood or implemented across the district. In addition, while individual teachers make significant efforts to encourage student attendance, many of the attendance-related interventions in evidence across the district focused on implementing consequences for absences rather than proactively promoting attendance. There is concern that a proposed decrease in the number of attendance assistance positions will negatively impact student attendance.

Dropout Prevention Strategies

A review of the data indicated a dropout rate for Polk County that is higher than the State's rate and that of districts of similar student enrollment for students with disabilities and for their nondisabled peers. In addition, the retention rate in Polk County is higher than its enrollment group and statewide for both student populations.

No formal district-wide dropout prevention programs were reported. However, individual schools are implementing activities that are expected to help keep students in school. Those school initiatives are listed below.

Kathleen High School

- mentors from Publix and Big Brothers/Big Sisters that are assigned to individual students
- parties on Friday afternoons for good attendance and grades

Auburndale High School

- assemblies organized by Bloodhound Achievement Recognition Committee during each grading period to reward students for good grades and attendance
- a computerized instructional program where students learn at their own pace for students with low FCAT scores
- Compass Lab provided for all 10th grades students to prepare for the FCAT
- a program targeting minority groups including women who are at-risk of dropping out, but have the potential to attend college
- social skills training for ESE students addressed through Student Intervention Center (SIC)
- social skills class including conflict resolution for all ESE students
- mentors provided from State Farm Insurance Companies
- career placement program for ESE students

Bartow High School

- incentives for good attendance supplied by Hardees Restaurant
- peer mediation
- a computerized instructional program where students learn at their own pace

- after-school tutoring provided by honor society students on reading and math

Haines City High School

- behavior management system in place that awards for attendance
- life skills classes incorporate mediation and conflict resolution
- after school reading program
- Plato lab classes
- intensive reading instruction for all students

Crystal Lake Middle School

- certificates awarded for perfect attendance
- school-to-work program emphasizes career awareness
- broad array of electives including industrial technology, cooking, fine arts, and band
- peer mediation program incorporating conflict resolution
- Guidance Assistance Program (GAP) for students with discipline problems and in need of anger management
- Extended Learning Program providing before and after school tutoring in reading, language arts, and math
- small group and individual social skills training provided through Peace River Center
- mentors provided by Polk Community College for girls interested in attending college

Lake Alfred Middle School

- life skills program addresses mediation and conflict resolution
- area churches and law enforcement provide mentoring services
- computer lab

Westwood Middle School

- breakfast program is noted to encourage students to come to school on time
- conflict resolution is an elective class for 6th graders
- Youth Motivator Program has adults from the community serve as mentors
- State Farm Insurance Company provides mentors
- City Force 2000 organization works with girls to improve their self-esteem

Medulla Elementary School

- Challenger Program providing incentives for student attendance
- top readers receive prizes from Outback and Hungry Howie's Restaurants
- Ameri-Corps grant providing mentoring services to students in reading
- Mountain Movers Partnership with local church working with high risk students on anger management, social skills development, and academics
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters in partnership with Geico Insurance for mentors
- Time to Read program sponsored by Time Warner Corporation which funds the training of mentors and materials

- Achievers Club pairing at-risk students with local business people for the purpose of job shadowing
- Challenge a Child Program in conjunction with United Way to pay for the contents of “mentoring boxes”
- PRIDES team comprised of a group of students who focus on drug awareness
- Student Intervention Center (SIC)/Positive Behavioral Support room with oversight by a paraprofessional
- Arts to Arts program conducted by high school students after school
- training for staff on Jerome Kagan’s system of peer mediation and conflict resolution
- school improvement plan addresses student tardiness and attendance
- SAI funds used to hire two retired teachers to provide reading instruction to students with low test scores.

Traviss Technical Center

- mentoring program that is job related
- employability skills classes address the importance of good attendance as it relates to maintaining a job
- a computerized instructional program where students learn at their own pace
- Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA)
- Business Education club of Traviss (BEST)
- Ambassador Club for students recommended for their leadership qualities
- School improvement plan dictating that each teacher meet with each students once per grading period to review employability skills including attendance and punctuality

District staff reported agency involvement with Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Association for the Handicapped, Youth and Family Services, Baptist Children’s Society, and Polk Community College. Of particular significance is the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce’s plan to identify 750 mentors.

Diploma options are routinely discussed at IEP meetings for students with disabilities. The diploma options handbook published by DOE is also distributed to students and their families.

Of the 16 cases that were selected during the on-site monitoring, nine were identified by their teachers as being at risk for dropping out based on being over-age for their grade, history of poor attendance, low reading level, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and lack of motivation. However, in none of these cases were the factors associated with being at risk for dropping out addressed on their IEPs, nor were any of them involved in any dropout prevention programs.

Teachers participating in the focus group indicated that special diploma students don’t have vocational classes available that will teach skills they can use. This was particularly seen to be a problem for self-contained students who are, for the most part, not given the

opportunity to participate in vocational courses. Moreover, there are only two vocational centers in Polk County. Teachers also felt that more money should be spent on vocational testing (aptitude) and training. Also, they suggested the District provide access to vocational opportunities earlier (i.e. middle school).

The teachers interviewed cited frustrations with students not being able to master the general education curriculum, perceptions of low self-esteem, substance abuse, socio-economic factors, absenteeism, feelings of isolation, grade retention, family history of dropping out, lack of parental involvement, and limited vocational training opportunities as contributing factors for dropping out of school.

Students who were interviewed identified some contributory factors for dropping out of school including boredom, low self-esteem, coursework that is too difficult, repetitive curriculum, peer pressure, poor attendance, the lure of fast money, lack of parental discipline, and limited educational and vocational options. On the other hand, students completing the survey indicated that ESE students are encouraged to stay in school.

Parents who participated in the focus group interview identified the following factors that contribute to student dropout rate: frustration at not being able to keep up with the other students, feeling of separation from other students, having no opportunities to attend summer school, and the lack of communication between parents and teachers.

In summary, a major area of concern regarding dropout prevention is the limited availability of vocational classes for students with disabilities. In addition, while a variety of activities are reported by individual teachers or schools, there is a lack of a coordinated district-wide dropout tracking system or prevention initiative. This results in fragmented individual services and activities, which in turn causes duplication of services or gaps in needed services. Finally, IEPs do not address factors related to helping students with disabilities, who are at-risk for dropping out, stay in school.

Least Restrictive Environment

In addition to the amount of time students with disabilities spend with nondisabled peers during the traditional school day, the issue of least restrictive environment (LRE) is concerned with the extent to which all students have access to and are included in extra-curricular activities and other special programs, such as formal dropout prevention programs. Interviews with district and school level staff indicated that students with disabilities have access to all extra-curricular activities offered in the schools including sports and clubs, as well as to formal dropout prevention programs, and that this access is the same as for nondisabled peers. It was reported that student placement and opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers exist to the extent appropriate throughout the district.

With few exceptions, the results of the case studies and classroom visits were generally reflective of the responses from interviews. In most of the schools visited, a full range of classroom placement options was available, and students with disabilities were actively involved in all aspects of the school environment. Of particular note was the inclusion

program at Medulla Elementary, which was implemented very effectively. However, concerns were noted by both Bureau and school staff at Westwood Middle School and Haines City High School regarding the limited interactions among students with disabilities who are placed in full-time classrooms, and their nondisabled peers. For many of these students, even lunch and elective classes include only students with disabilities. For some students, it appeared that the practice of scheduling “ESE sections” of certain electives resulted in more individualized and appropriate activities, while for many other students it only resulted in limiting interactions with nondisabled peers. In addition, unequal access to computers and other technology for students with disabilities was reported and observed at Crystal Lake Middle School and Kathleen High School.

Several parents who participated in the focus groups expressed concern about the appropriate placement of their children. Some parents felt that their children do not receive the help they need when they are grouped with students of varying exceptionalities. Parents were also concerned that their children were being isolated from regular education students, resulting in low self-esteem. In two out of three phone interviews, parents indicated that their children were not being encouraged to participate in extra-curricular and dropout prevention programs. However, results of the parent surveys contradicted information gained during the focus group. Parents responding to the surveys indicated an overall satisfaction with the amount of time their children spend with their nondisabled peers.

During the student focus groups, students with disabilities from Lakeland High School complained about the physical location of their ESE classes. Specifically, they were not content with the fact that ESE classes are located in a separate area of the school where they felt they could be easily identified as ESE. Also, some students did not want to make use of certain ESE services because doing so would differentiate them from other students. A few ESE students who participated in the focus groups were involved with regular education students in extra-curricular activities outside of class. Students reported being involved in ROTC, football, weightlifting, softball, and a class club.

In summary, while the district appears to provide a full range of placement options for students with disabilities, there is concern that some students with disabilities are segregated from their nondisabled peers during the school day. Of particular concern is the scheduling of lunch and/or electives only with other students with disabilities. Opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their nondisabled peers need to be increased.

Behavior/Discipline

Staff reported that it is often difficult to ensure that district policies and procedures related to the conduct of Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) and development of Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP) are implemented fully and accurately at the school level. The district staff would like to fund an LEA position at each school that would not only provide a direct link to the district, but would help ensure that training and compliance issues like the implementation of FBAs and BIPs would be addressed more consistently and accurately.

Staff also reported that the student code of conduct is intended to apply to all students including those with disabilities, but it did not take into account specific rules and regulations related specifically to disciplining students with disabilities. It was reported that the ESE portion of the Polk County Code of Conduct for the 2002-2003 school year now contains the language from the IDEA and the implementing regulations.

Staff expressed concern that all disciplinary actions are under the auspices of the Office of Discipline and are intended to be “reactive” rather than “proactive” in nature. A lack of agreement and coordination of policies and procedures related specifically to ESE students was reported to be problematic.

The following interventions for disciplining all students including those with disabilities were identified: in-school suspension, out-of school suspension, corporal punishment (approved by parents), after school and Saturday work details, parent verbal and written contracts and conferences, after school detentions, lunch detentions, time-out, changing seating arrangements and student schedules, and office referrals. In addition, students with therapeutic needs may be staffed into one of five ESE Countywide programs as a continuation of services. Mental Health counseling and social services are infused into a focused curriculum model that proactively addresses mental health and discipline related needs. These programs are available in Lakeland, Bartow, and Lake Alfred. A crisis stabilization program, PACE, is located in Winter Haven. Interim alternative placement programs are available at the Bill Duncan Opportunity Center in Lakeland and the Don Woods Center in Dundee.

School staff interviews provided inconsistent responses about the district’s policy on the number of days of suspension that would trigger the administration of an FBA. The interviews also revealed that interventions appear to be more punitive in nature while other more positive interventions and strategies were identified through classroom observations and school interviews. However, it was evident that staff at Auburndale High School, Traviss Technical Center, Lake Alfred Discovery Middle School, and Medulla Elementary School use positive approaches and interventions.

Positive behavior management systems were observed through the case studies, including the awarding of points to be exchanged for incentives like money and prizes for appropriate behavior. It was noted through the case study process that only one FBA was administered for one student. There are other students identified as having behavior problems for whom FBAs should either have been administered or considered.

Of concern were classrooms where teachers did not employ appropriate behavior management strategies. While not a systemic finding, it was noted that effective behavior management strategies were more often observed in general education classrooms, with ESE teachers often observed using less effective strategies. The lack of effective strategies was noted to contribute to students being off-task and disruptive. Specifically, individual teachers at Haines City High School and Crystal Lake Middle School did not implement appropriate behavior management techniques. This finding does not indicate

that ineffective instruction and lack of appropriate classroom management are the norms at the two schools.

In summary, there is inconsistent implementation of functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) for students with disabilities, and some confusion regarding district policies related to these. In addition, the reactive nature of the discipline policy administered by the Office of Discipline may not promote the use of positive behavioral supports for both ESE and nondisabled students. In many schools, there is a need for a consistent comprehensive school-wide discipline plan, with clearly defined student expectancies, consequences for meeting or failing to meet those expectancies, consistent application of behavior management techniques within and between classrooms, and a structured array of in-school interventions that employ positive behavioral supports.

Curriculum

The classroom observations and interviews with staff indicated that, at the school sites visited, students with disabilities have varying degrees of access to the general curriculum.

Individual interviews with school staff indicated an understanding about the various accommodations that may be implemented for ESE students. The District's Transition Coordinator was noted to provide training that addressed using accommodations at 26 school sites. Through the case studies and classroom visitations, it was determined that the following accommodations are implemented: flexible settings, schedules, and responses; extended time for taking tests; modifying written assignments; credit for class participation; reading tests out loud; planners to organize work; and alternate ways to give directions.

Through the interview and case study process, it was noted that ESE students have access to the general education curriculum primarily when they are placed in regular education classes for all or part of the day. The decision regarding the student's placement and subsequent access to the general education curriculum is routinely made by the IEP team, and is based on the student's academic level and behavior. ESE students receiving instruction in a full-time separate class setting were observed to receive instruction in a modified curriculum, while students pursuing a standard diploma were observed to receive instruction in regular education classes where they have access to the general education curriculum.

An exception to this was noted at Medulla Elementary School. It was reported that all ESE students at Medulla follow a curriculum based on Florida's Sunshine State Standards that provides for a scope and sequence of skills that are the same for all students.

Also of note was a case study conducted at Crystal Lake Middle School. This was a case of a student whose IEP specifies use of a modified curriculum for language arts and math that is adapted from the regular education material from a lower grade level with

additional support in terms of the use of accommodations. This student received instruction in a modified curriculum, while enrolled in a general education classroom.

During an interview at Kathleen High School, it was reported that the District plans to return to a system where some ESE students who are pursuing a standard diploma will take general education courses in ESE classrooms that are taught by ESE certified teachers.

The observations and interviews at Bartow High School, Triviss Technical Center, and Medulla Elementary School revealed generally good instructional practices. The following indicators were observed during classroom visits: skills are taught and assessed in the content of real life activities and daily routines; students participate in individual, small group and large group instruction; students use age appropriate curriculum and activities; each student spends most of his/her time engaged in active learning activities; instructional prompts and assistance are individualized and based on student skill and performance level; students are exposed to culturally relevant curriculum; students have appropriate access to the general curriculum (as indicated on the IEP); teachers provide students with accommodations as indicated on the IEP; and schedules reflect a variety of instructional formats (independent work, one-to-one direct instruction, and free time).

Overall, classroom observations in all schools revealed many of the same instructional practices noted above, but there was evidence that not all teachers are adept in individualizing instruction and using materials that are culturally relevant and age-appropriate. In addition, some teachers had difficulty controlling student behavior that impeded instruction and subsequent learning.

The parent, teacher, and student focus groups provided additional insight into curricular issues that might contribute to the dropout rate in Polk County. Most parents interviewed felt their children's curriculum needs are not being met. In particular, parents were concerned about the repetition of below grade level material from year to year. Several parents reported paying for private tutors for their children because it was believed schools were not meeting the academic needs of their children. Parents voiced particular concern about the extent to which students are taught social skills rather than academic skills. Many parents also expressed their beliefs that regular education teachers are not providing the accommodations and modifications indicated on individual students' IEPs. This concern also was reflected in comments from some teachers in the teacher focus groups that, while some teachers are cooperative in terms of providing modifications for ESE students, others are not as supportive.

Students participating in the focus groups also indicated that classroom accommodations are not always implemented. Students in the standard diploma groups felt that regular education teachers do not provide the accommodations outlined on their IEPs. Some students believed it is difficult to obtain the accommodations that are indicated on their IEPs or that they feel should be provided, such as extra time to complete assignments or tests.

Students in the standard diploma groups participated primarily in regular education academic classes. At both Lakeland and Bartow High Schools, students reported taking only one ESE class, Learning Strategies. Most believed that Learning Strategies was beneficial to their academic development in that they received additional support enabling them to spend more time working on material from their regular education classes. Some students interviewed at Lakeland and Bartow High Schools commented on the lack of variation in teaching strategies used by their regular education teachers. “They teach in the same way all the time. Like some teachers only talk, they should try different styles of teaching. I think they should have more hands-on work. If they had different styles, everyone would learn.” Another student went on to say, “It’s hard for the teacher. They develop a certain method and they use it all the time.”

Students in the special diploma groups interviewed, indicated participating in regular education courses such as physical education, nutrition and wellness, food preparation, and child development. Students expressed a desire to study the same materials and content as regular education students. Some students complained that the coursework was not challenging and that it was repetitive from year to year. Several students were frustrated by the fact that they were using the same textbooks throughout high school. Most teachers who participated in the focus group interview agreed with the students. They also believed their schools were not providing appropriately challenging curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities. One teacher stated, “It’s repetitive They get the same thing over and over again. Ninth through twelfth grade students get taught together so they get the same curriculum taught to them over and over again. Students are exposed to the same books, the same class, and the same teacher from year to year.”

Overall, the results of the interviews with district and school staff, the case studies, and the classroom observations revealed that many individuals confused educational setting (e.g., regular classroom) with access to the general education curriculum. In addition, it was evident that instructional accommodations are not provided consistently to students with disabilities. It was also determined that access to career development and vocational education is limited for students with disabilities. Students who are interested in pursuing vocational education at Triviss Technical Center must meet a minimum academic requirement or score on the TABE. Many students with disabilities do not meet that requirement and cannot participate in the program leaving few other vocational alternatives for them to pursue.

Assessment

The results of interviews, class visits, and case studies revealed that student progress is routinely assessed through class assignments and work samples, homework, teacher-made tests, teacher observations, and standardized or formal testing. Progress is reported for students with disabilities on the same schedule as for their nondisabled peers. The IEP team uses the student’s progress or assessment results when developing a new IEP and planning for instruction. The identification of goals and objectives is dependent on the results of assessments and student progress in meeting previous goals and objectives. The Brigance and BASIS are used as alternate assessments for students with more severe disabilities who cannot participate in the FCAT.

District and School staff who were interviewed described how the requirements for graduation with a standard diploma impact the decision-making process for students with disabilities. It was reported that in order for students to graduate with a standard diploma, they must pass the FCAT. This can be a problem for some students with disabilities who are capable of passing their coursework, but not the FCAT. Because of this, some students are reported to be reverting to the special diploma option. Several individuals interviewed believed that more students with disabilities are receiving a special diploma than in previous years due to the requirement of passing the FCAT.

Taking the FCAT and determining the supports and accommodations that need to be provided are considerations for the IEP team. It was also reported that diploma options are routinely considered for students at their 8th grade IEP meeting.

Several teachers who participated in the focus group interview believed that ESE students are unprepared to take the FCAT in spite of their being provided with preparatory training. They said that students had little interest in the test and were not motivated. Students were frustrated by some of the test procedures. "Students are allowed 45 minutes practice on the computer, but then have a pencil and paper test. That is a big transition."

Many teachers felt pressured into administering the FCAT to ESE students in order to meet the goal of an 85% participation rate identified by the state. Many felt the 85% target was driving curriculum decisions for ESE students. Teachers who were surveyed indicated that schools attempt to ensure that as many students with disabilities as possible graduate with a standard diploma by providing extra help to students in retaking the FCAT, but that the test itself is an inappropriate measure of performance for many students. The results of the teacher surveys indicated that schools do in fact help keep students from dropping out of school by providing appropriate testing accommodations, conducting ongoing assessments of individual student performance, and providing teachers with FCAT test preparation materials.

Teachers were observed giving feedback on daily assignments, teaching test taking strategies, using standard FCAT test preparation materials and activities, and using alternative forms of assessments for daily work and in class assignments. However, there was limited opportunity for the monitors to observe those activities in every class visited.

All students interviewed reported taking either the FCAT or HSCT. The students were provided with accommodations such as extended time, reading parts of the test aloud, and alternative settings. Students expressed a concern that some teachers crammed test-taking skills for the FCAT into a two to three week time period prior to the test administration. Students interviewed were concerned about the fact that regardless of meeting credit requirements, the FCAT is a barrier to graduating with a standard diploma

Parents reported that their children were provided accommodations. Some parents stated that schools offered additional support for FCAT preparation outside of school hours.

However, that help was only for certain students. Most parents of the high school students felt that the FCAT was a barrier to graduating with a standard diploma.

Most of the cases studied were reported to be making academic progress. For some of those cases, teachers were able to provide data that indicates progress including pre and post reading scores, FCAT results, and report card grades.

In summary, there is a district-wide emphasis on FCAT preparation. The district encourages students with disabilities to take the FCAT, including the use of accommodations. However, as students progress through school, the belief by parents and teachers that students with disabilities will pass the FCAT and get a standard diploma decreases. IEP team decisions regarding diploma options are impacted by FCAT performance. Analyses of FCAT and routine assessment results are not generally tied in with sequential planning for instruction for students with disabilities.

Post-School Transition

The results of interviews, class visits, and case studies suggested that ESE students do not have access to vocational and career development programs at the same level as nondisabled students. The district staff interviewed reported the need for better collaboration between the ESE department and vocational education. It was suggested that the two departments would be able to serve the ESE population in Polk County more efficiently and effectively if they were grouped together administratively.

Interviews with district and school staff indicated that students with disabilities and their families are made aware of diploma options at IEP meetings. A diploma options handbook is handed out to parents at the IEP meetings. Diploma options may be discussed as early as the 5th grade and routinely by age 14, consistent with the implementation of the federal transition requirements. It was evident through the interview process that performance on the FCAT influences the decision about the diploma option selected.

With the exception of Westwood Middle School, each school visited reported offering some job-preparatory or vocational education program options. It was reported that individual school administrators were responsible for determining the specific types of programs offered at each school, and for allocating the necessary resources. It was suggested that schools could utilize funds generated by ESE students to ensure those students' access to vocational programs. It was reported that school attendance and diploma options are the two major factors considered when determining the program in which a student will participate. The programs reported by the individual schools are as follows:

Auburndale High School

- career Experience Program where students work and earn credit for that work
- On-the-Job- Training (OJT) where students with disabilities attend school for part of the day and work at a job site for the other part

- agriculture, business, home economics, drafting, and woodshop classes for 11th and 12th graders
- lab for students with significant needs to learn life skills (laundry and cooking)

Bartow High School

- Career Experience for ESE students
- Career Placement (paid work)
- Business Cooperative Education for regular education students
- Diversified Cooperative Training for regular education students
- Agriculture Cooperative
- non-paid internships in professional settings in conjunction with Polk County Community College
- Agency Fair conducted yearly

Haines City High School

- vocational and job preparation courses begin in the 9th grade
- students in the special diploma track take career education course
- Career Experience Program
- OJT at local businesses
- CBI for ESE students in full-time self contained ESE classrooms
- ROTC (considered as a job path)

Kathleen High School

- vocational classes including business, food services, auto mechanics, industrial arts, and drafting
- Performance Assessment Expectation System (PAES) used to measure student aptitude, productivity, and interest in 4 areas: manipulative processing, industry, consumer science, and business
- five job sites where students have job trainers
- Career Placement for students to earn credits for hours gainfully employed
- OJT for ESE students

Crystal Lake Middle School

- wheel classes (shop, home economics, computers, agriculture, and art)

Westwood Middle School

- no vocational education or job preparation programs were noted

Lake Alfred Discovery Middle School

- wheel classes
- CBI classes go to the University of Florida Citrus Lab to learn about planting groves

Medulla Elementary School

- Job Fair
- Outback Restaurant provides career shadowing opportunities

Traviss Technical Center

- approximately 35 job related vocational programs
- on-the-job training opportunities
- job placement

The results of the teacher surveys indicated that schools minimally coordinate on-the-job training with outside agencies, teach transition skills for future employment and independent living, and provide students with job training. The students who completed the survey reported that their ESE teachers teach skills or content that will be useful later on in life. On the other hand, the parents who were surveyed felt their children do not learn useful life skills.

All students participating in the focus groups reported having attended a transition planning meeting. Most of the students felt that they are able to express their preferences and what they have to say is considered.

Students in the standard diploma groups that were interviewed at both high schools had contrasting views regarding whether or not their school encourages them to pursue a standard diploma. Students at Lakeland High School believed that their school is not encouraging them to obtain a standard diploma. Yet, some students at Bartow High School felt that their school set ESE students on a standard diploma track without asking their opinion regarding which diploma they wanted to pursue. Students in the standard diploma groups were familiar with the two diploma options, but some had misconceptions about the opportunities available after high school for each type of diploma.

The students preparing for a special diploma who were interviewed reported participating in a variety of vocational education courses. Students also recognized that guidance counselors are available to provide assistance with job, college, and scholarship searches and to discuss options for after high school. However, some students felt that counselors do not explain post school options in a way they could understand.

In summary, the post-school transition options available to all students, including those with disabilities, do not appear to be the result of a coordinated endeavor by the District. Instead, specific schools are making some effort, but the programs vary from school to school. The lack of coordination may be a result of the reported lack of communication between the vocational education and exceptional student education departments. This lack of coordination has resulted in a limited array of vocational and on-the-job training (OJT) services for students with disabilities district-wide.

Stakeholder Opinions Related to the Trigger

Through interviews and focus groups, the members of the monitoring team asked district and school staff, parents, and students for their opinions related to the reasons that Polk County has one of the highest dropout rates in the state for students with disabilities. The individuals who were interviewed through this monitoring process presented these opinions based on their own experiences and unique perspectives. Some of the opinions

were substantiated by the monitoring team. The following is a summary of those individual comments.

One factor that was cited by district staff as well as individuals from almost all of the schools visited was the possibility of inaccurate data collection and/or reporting. There was a general perception that the dropout rate is not significantly worse in Polk County than in other school districts, and that there is not a significant difference between the dropout rate for students with disabilities and nondisabled students. This said, respondents consistently identified the following issues as contributing to the problem of students with disabilities in Polk County dropping out: the need for more vocational programs for all students at both the middle and high school levels; increased access to existing vocational programs for students with disabilities; a lack of effective and motivating instruction to address the significant academic deficits of some students, especially in reading; higher performance standards required to earn a standard diploma (e.g., FCAT); an under-emphasis on the value of education by parents; and, the perception among some students and families that a special diploma is not worth remaining in school for, if a student can get a minimum wage job without a diploma.

Several staff members commented that students become frustrated with their perceived lack of academic progress, and they simply “give up.” In addition, several respondents cited an unequal distribution of resources across the county (e.g., industry and job opportunities) as contributing to difficulties in developing school-to-work partnerships and providing transition services for students with disabilities.

During the teacher focus group, teachers suggested that additional vocational training facilities, access to vocational opportunities for ESE students at an earlier age, supplementary support and funding for teachers, more staffing specialists and qualified ESE teachers, after school programs, and intensive group counseling and mental health services would help keep students in school.

Students who participated in the student focus groups made several suggestions for improving ESE services. They include classroom size reduction, less strict school rules, English and math textbooks that cover the regular education curriculum, a four-year college specifically for students graduating with a special diploma, additional support for ESE students, and more emphasis on academics rather than sports.

In summary, the most frequently cited contributor to the high dropout rate in Polk County was the need for more comprehensive vocational education programs for all students. Additionally, there is a need to provide more intensive and effective instruction designed to remediate student deficits in the basic academic skill areas of reading and math, thus increasing the likelihood that students with disabilities will be able to obtain a standard diploma.

Student Record and District Form Reviews

Student Record Reviews

Through the established focused monitoring process, eight student records were selected to be reviewed for compliance with federal and state regulations. These records were randomly selected from the population of students with disabilities, excluding those identified as receiving only speech therapy. The records were sent to the DOE for review by Bureau staff prior to the on-site visit. The sample group included six elementary school students, one high school student, and one student enrolled in an alternative school.

Of the eight IEPs reviewed, all were current. Compliance with the requirements of federal and state laws in the areas of reevaluations and change of placement or services was noted on all IEPs reviewed. Specific items were predetermined by the DOE to be subject to federal funding adjustments or to requiring the reconvening of the IEP team, as noted in the Focused Monitoring Manual. None of the records reviewed during this portion of the record review process were revealed to be out-of-compliance on these specific items. However, there were other items that were identified as out-of-compliance. Two areas of non-compliance appeared to be systemic in nature. One related to the reporting of initiation and duration dates of services, and the other to the development of meaningful and measurable goals and objectives.

In the area of providing initiation/duration dates of special education services, four of the eight records failed to provide accurate information. One of the IEPs indicated a duration date for services that exceeded the duration date of the IEP. Another IEP indicated that the special education services would terminate at the end of the school year, yet the IEP would continue to be in effect until November 9 of the following school year. In the area of initiation/duration dates for accommodations and/or modifications, three of the eight records either did not contain this information or the information did not correspond with the initiation/duration dates of the IEP.

In the area of writing measurable annual goals, three of the eight records included at least one goal that was not measurable. Often, the intent of the goals was unclear. A goal such as “J. will improve his language skills one full grade level this year in three out of four trials” is not measurable without a current level stated in the present level of performance statement, and the criteria (three out of four trials) is confusing in this context. In addition, three of the eight records either did not include annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks that corresponded with the information provided in the present level statements, or the present level statements were unclear. When a specific area of need is stated in the present level statement (e.g., inability to recognize or state the sounds of letters, inability to perform addition problems to ten), there must be a corresponding goal, objective, or benchmark that addresses this need. One IEP included four goals with ten objectives related to writing, math, organization, and social skills. The baseline levels of performance in all ten objectives was reported listed as 40%, and the desired outcome criteria for all was set at 80%. This appears to reflect inaccurate reporting of baseline data and/or a lack of individualization.

In addition, some of the records contained instances of noncompliance that were not of a systemic nature. These individual findings are as follows:

- no evidence that the IEP team considered extended school year needs of the student
- related services were not identified, however an initiation and duration date for related services was provided
- a description of special education services was not provided
- frequency and location of services were not listed for special education services
- the interpreter of instructional implications was not recorded on the IEP
- no evidence that the concerns of the parent for enhancing the child's education were taken into consideration
- no agency representative invited to the meeting for a student at age 16
- transfer of rights not provided to student at least one year prior to the student's 18th birthday
- frequency of accommodations was not specific
- no evidence of consideration of results of most recent evaluation
- no evidence of consideration of results of state or district assessments
- an LEA representative was not present at meeting
- progress report(s) on goals was not in evidence

In addition to the formal record reviews carried out as a part of the standard focused monitoring procedures described above, an additional record review was conducted in Polk County. Through the case study process, a pattern of noncompliance was revealed regarding the timeliness of IEPs and reevaluations for students with disabilities and educational plans (EPs) for students identified as gifted. Due to the nature and significance of the finding, under separate cover the DOE required that it be addressed prior to the district's receipt of the preliminary monitoring report. The deadline for these activities was established as July 30, 2002, and the district met this requirement.

As part of this supplemental review, the district submitted a computer-generated list reflecting the status of student records from three high schools as of March 26, 2002. As a result, the district was required to submit documentation that appropriate action had been taken regarding 136 IEPs, 24 EPs, and 60 reevaluations reported to be not current. A review of this documentation revealed that some of the records had not been updated in the computer and were erroneously reported as not current, and that the district had convened meetings to bring up-to-date the records that required it. Consequently, 66 IEPs were subject to a funding adjustment for being not current on the target date.

In summary, systemic findings were identified in the reporting of initiation and duration dates for services and in the development of measurable and appropriate annual goals, including short-term objectives and benchmarks. Individual findings for student records were noted in 13 areas, as noted above. In addition, there was a systemic finding related to the timely development of IEPs, EPs, and reevaluations that resulted in a funding adjustment for 66 IEPs.

District Forms Review

Forms representing the thirteen areas identified below were submitted to Bureau staff for a review to determine compliance with federal and state laws. Findings were noted on three of the forms. In addition, changes are required on three forms at the next printing. The district was notified of the specific findings via a separate letter dated June 7, 2002. An explanation of the specific findings may be found in appendix D.

- *Parent Notification of Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Meeting*
- *IEP Forms*
- *Notice and Consent for Initial Placement~*
- *Informed Notice and Consent for Evaluation*
- *Informed Notice of Reevaluation*
- *Notification of Change of Placement**
- *Notification of Change of FAPE**
- *Informed Notice of Refusal*
- *Documentation of Staffing/Eligibility Determination~*
- *Informed Notice of Dismissal**
- *Notice: Not Eligible for Exceptional Student Placement~*
- *Summary of Procedural Safeguards*
- *Annual Notice of Confidentiality**

* indicates findings that require immediate attention

~ indicates findings that require changes upon the next printing of the form

Summary

Based on the findings stated in this report, the district is expected to develop system improvement strategies in collaboration with Bureau staff. These strategies should specify activities and strategies to address the identified findings in the following areas:

- Staff Training and Knowledge
- Student Attendance
- Dropout Prevention Strategies
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Behavior/Discipline
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Post-School Transition
- Stakeholder Opinions Related to the Trigger
- Student Records Review
- District Forms Review

Following is a summary of the findings in each of the identified areas that requires an improvement plan, as well as a format for completion of the system improvement strategies.

Polk County School District Focused Monitoring System Improvement Strategies Plan

This section includes the issues identified by the Bureau as most significantly in need of improvement. The district is required to provide system improvement strategies to address identified findings, which may include an explanation of specific activities the district has committed to implementing, or it may consist of a broader statement describing planned strategies. For each issue, the plan also must define the measurable evidence of whether or not the desired outcome has been achieved. Target dates that extend for more than one year should include benchmarks in order to track interim progress. Findings identified as “ESE” are those findings that reflect issues specific to ESE students. Findings identified as “All” are those findings that reflect issues related to the student population as a whole, including ESE students.

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Staff Knowledge and Training	1. There is a need for continued training of teachers in skill areas related to effectively providing instruction for all students, including the use of instructional accommodations.		X	See “Curriculum.”	

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Student Attendance	2. District policies and procedures for tracking attendance and for allowing students to make up missed work are not consistently implemented across the district.		X	<p>The District has policies and procedures for tracking attendance and allowing students to make up missed work. These policies and procedures will be reviewed with school-level staff.</p> <p>In order to ensure that parents understand the importance of attendance, elementary schools are using attendance teachers to follow up on absent students.</p> <p>To ensure that parents are aware of their children's attendance status, some Middle and Senior High Schools are using Phone Master (to call parents of absent students) or Pinnacle Software (to email parents of absent students).</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment reveals consistent implementation of attendance policies and procedures across the district (elementary, middle, and high), including the opportunity to make up missed assignments.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>
Dropout Prevention Strategies	3. There is a lack of a coordinated district-wide dropout tracking system.		X	<p>Adult Schools are given a list monthly of Middle and Senior High students who drop out.</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment provides documentation that the adult schools have provided information on available programs to all students reported as having dropped out during the school year.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Least Restrictive Environment	4. Some students with disabilities are segregated from their nondisabled peers during lunch and/or electives as a result of administrative convenience.	X		<p>Designation of an Inclusion Facilitator</p> <p>One High School has moved to an inclusion service model.</p> <p>22 schools implementing various levels of inclusion.</p> <p>Training by Florida Department of Education Inclusion Network (FIN).</p> <p>District ESE staff will review scheduling practices at Haines City HS and Westwood MS to determine ways in which students with disabilities can be ensured access to nondisabled peers.</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment of 5 schools (sample to include Haines City HS and Westwood MS) reveals that placement decisions for students with disabilities are based solely on student needs, and not on administrative convenience.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>
Behavior/ Discipline	5. In many schools there is a need for a consistent comprehensive school-wide discipline plan, including a structured array of in-school interventions that employ positive behavioral supports, implementation of functional behavioral assessments (FBAs), and the development of behavior intervention plans (BIPs).		X	<p>ESE section of district “Code of Conduct” revised to reflect a more positive philosophy and a proactive stance in dealing with students with disabilities.</p> <p>Development of discipline procedure flowcharts to ensure consistency.</p> <p>Continuous Improvement Monitoring Plan – Discipline (CIMP) addresses out-of-school suspension at target schools.</p>	<p>Code of Conduct revision submitted to the Bureau</p> <p>June, 2003</p> <p>Results of CIMP reported as required.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Behavior/ Discipline (cont.)	5. Continued from above.		X	<p>Establishment of school-based Support Facilitators at all middle and high schools, and selected elementary schools, to provide training and oversight to school staff.</p> <p>Monthly training of Support Facilitators on procedures related to discipline and behavior management.</p> <p>Monthly on-site training related to discipline and behavior management provided by staffing specialists at their schools.</p> <p>Initiation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) training for the county.</p> <p>Development of training materials for the implementation of FBAs and development of BIPs.</p> <p>District Strategic Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All classroom staff will have an understanding of effective classroom management strategies. 	<p>Report of district self-assessment of a sample of schools (one each elementary, middle, and high from each region) reveals a comprehensive school-wide discipline plan in place in all schools.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p> <p>Report of district self-assessment (random selection of 20 students with disabilities who have been suspended for at least 8 days) reveals that procedures were implemented to conduct FBAs and develop BIPs for all students.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Curriculum	6. Instructional accommodations are not provided consistently to students with disabilities.	X		<p>Establishment of school-based Support Facilitators at all middle and high schools, and selected elementary schools, to provide training/oversight to school staff.</p> <p>Monthly training of Support Facilitators on issues related to curriculum and instruction.</p> <p>Monthly on-site training on issues related to curriculum and instruction of ESE students provided by staffing specialists at their schools.</p> <p>"Dealing with Differences" training on accommodations provided to school staff.</p> <p>Presentations/workshops by FIN, FDLRS, ESE department on accommodations and effective instruction.</p> <p>DOE accommodations booklet provided to each ESE teacher in the district.</p> <p>Implement use of the district reading program in primary ESE classrooms, beginning with the 2003-04 school year, to ensure coordination between regular education and ESE classrooms.</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment of random sample of 10 classrooms reveals that all teachers sampled use effective instructional practices, including the appropriate use of accommodations.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Curriculum (cont.)	6. Continued from above.			District Strategic Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a set of district-wide effective teaching/learning strategies for grades K-12. • Provide access to curriculum and implement strategies that will meet the needs of all students (including LEP and ESE students to ensure access and mastery. 	
	7. Access to career development and vocational education is limited for students with disabilities.	X		ESE classroom located on campus of Florida Southern College. Collaboration with vocational education program to provide additional vocational classes at the two voc-tech schools. Plan for prevocational and vocational classes at the ESE countywide sites, and for additional vocational programming for behaviorally at-risk students. Develop a survey and administer to high school students to determine perceived student needs for vocational programs.	Report of district self-assessment reveals increased number of vocational courses offered, and increased enrollment of ESE students. June, 2003 June, 2004

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Assessment	8. Analyses of FCAT and routine assessment results were not generally tied in with sequential planning for instruction for students with disabilities.		X	<p>Computerized IEP requires report of standardized tests in the present level of educational performance statement for each IEP.</p> <p>Completion of an academic improvement plan (AIP) will be required for all students identified with weaknesses in the reading components or in FCAT results, and as part of prereferral process.</p> <p>District Strategic Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop district wide formative and summative assessments based upon its aligned curriculum to accurately measure intended learning outcomes for each grade level/course, to identify and address academic skills, concepts, strengths and deficiencies. 	<p>Report of district self-assessment of a random sample of 10 student records reveals use of FCAT and routine assessment in the development of the IEP.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>
Opinions Related to the Trigger	9. The most frequently cited contributor to the high dropout rate in Polk County was the need for more comprehensive vocational education programs for all students.		X	See "Curriculum."	

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
	10. There is a need for intensive and effective instruction designed to remediate student deficits in the basic academic skill areas of reading and math for students with disabilities.	X		See "Curriculum."	
Records and Forms Reviews	<p>11. Two areas of non-compliance were found to be systemic in nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reporting of initiation and duration dates of services • measurable annual goals and objectives. 	X		<p>The computerized IEP program presents the opportunity for initiation and duration dates for all services listed in the IEP.</p> <p>The computerized IEP program provides teachers a bank of measurable annual goals and objectives, as well as a blank field in which to develop additional goals.</p> <p>All instructional personnel will be trained in the use of the computerized IEP during the 2002-03 school year, including ensuring that IEPs are individualized to the student; trainings will continue monthly for new hires.</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment of a random sample of 25 IEPs reveals at least 90% are compliant according to monitoring work papers and source book developed by the Bureau.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Records and Forms Review (cont.)	12. Noncompliance was found regarding the timeliness of IEPs and reevaluations for students with disabilities and educational plans, most notably at Auburndale H.S., Bartow H.S., and Haines City H.S.	X		<p>A program run from MIS noting overdue IEPs and reevaluations is distributed monthly to Area Superintendents and building Principals.</p> <p>The computerized IEP program will give teachers access to a list of all their students and a count of how many days before the next IEP/Reevaluation is due.</p> <p>MIS run is currently being distributed monthly.</p> <p>This report will be available to teachers when they have entered the data on their students into the program the first time.</p> <p>Student records were reviewed for the 136 IEPs, 24 EPs, and 60 reevaluations identified by district MIS as not current at the identified schools. Inaccurate records were updated, and IEP team meetings were convened to develop IEPs for those students whose IEPs had lapsed.</p>	<p>Report of district self-assessment of MIS reports from 10 schools (to include Auburndale H.S., Bartow H.S., Haines City H.S., and 7 randomly selected elementary and middle schools) reveals at least 90% compliance regarding timeliness of IEPs, EPs, and reevaluations.</p> <p>June, 2003 June, 2004</p> <p>Documentation submitted to the Bureau on June 30, 2002 indicated that all targeted records were current.</p>

Category	Findings	ESE	All	System Improvement Strategy	Evidence of Change (Including target date)
Records and Forms Review (cont.)	13. Forms review findings that require immediate attention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notification of Change of Placement (and FAPE)</i> • <i>Informed Notice of Dismissal</i> • <i>Annual Notice of Confidentiality</i> 	X		The "Prior Written Notice" form in the computerized IEP program has been revised to address audits concerns with Notice of Change of Placement and Informed Notice of Dismissal. The Annual Notice of Confidentiality (FERPA) was revised to acknowledge state requirement for compliance.	Revised forms submitted to the Bureau for review. January, 2003
	14. Forms review findings that require changes at the next scheduled printing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notice and Consent for Initial Placement</i> • <i>Documentation of Staffing/Eligibility Determination</i> • <i>Notice: Not Eligible for Exceptional Student Placement</i> 	X		Notice and Consent for Initial Placement; Staffing Eligibility and Ineligibility have been revised in the computerized IEP program to eliminate the phrase "and approved."	Revisions of the computerized forms submitted to the Bureau. January, 2003 NCR forms used in the county will be revised with the next printing, and will be submitted to the Bureau within 30 days of printing.

Appendix A- Survey Results

**Polk County School District
 Focused Monitoring Report
 Parent Survey Results**

Responding to the need to increase the involvement of parents and families of students with disabilities in evaluating the educational services provided to their children, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services contracted with the University of Miami to develop and administer a parent survey in conjunction with the Bureau’s district monitoring activities. In 1999, the parent survey was administered in 12 districts; in 2000, it was administered in 15 districts and two special schools; and, in 2001, it was administered in four districts. At the time of this analysis, it had been administered to two districts in 2002.

In conjunction with the 2002 Polk County monitoring activities, the parent survey was sent to parents of the 12,348 students with disabilities for whom complete addresses were provided by the district. A total of 1,869 parents (PK, n=92; K-5, n=840; 6-8, n=536; 9-12, n=401) representing 15% of the sample, returned the survey. 850 surveys were returned as undeliverable, representing 7% of the sample.

Parents responded “yes” or “no” to each survey item, indicating that they either agreed or disagreed with the statement. The district response for each item was calculated as the percentage of respondents who agreed with the item.

	% Yes
Staff Training and Knowledge	
• Overall, I am satisfied with the level of knowledge and experience of school personnel.	77
Attendance	
• N/A	
Dropout Program	
• My child's school does all it can to keep students from dropping out of school.	74
LRE	
• At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about ways that my child could spend time with students in regular classes.	62
• My child's school encourages acceptance of students with disabilities.	77
• My child's school involves students with disabilities in clubs, sports, or other activities.	71
• Overall, I am satisfied with the amount of time my child spends with regular education students.	80
• Overall, I am satisfied with the way special education teachers and regular education teacher’s work together.	77

Behavior/Discipline

- N/A

Curriculum

- At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about which diploma my child may receive. 51
- At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about the requirements for different diplomas. 42
- My child's teachers give students with disabilities extra time or different assignments, if needed. 74
- My child's school provides students with disabilities updated books and materials. 69
- My child's school offers a variety of vocational courses, such as computers and business technology. 64
- My child's school offers students with disabilities the classes they need to graduate with a standard diploma. 73

Assessment

- At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about whether my child would take the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). 59
- At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about whether my child should get accommodations (special testing conditions), for example, extra time. 58

Transition

- My child is learning skills that will be useful later on in life. 84
- My child's school provides information to students about education and jobs after high school. 48

Other Items

- Overall, I am satisfied with the exceptional education services my child receives. 75
- Overall, I am satisfied with my child's academic progress. 71
- Overall, I am satisfied with the effect of exceptional student education on my child's self-esteem. 74
- Overall, I am satisfied with the way I am treated by school personnel. 87
- Overall, I am satisfied with how quickly services are implemented following an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) decision. 75
- My child is usually happy at school. 84
- My child spends most of the school day involved in productive activities. 79
- My child has friends at school. 93
- My child is aiming for a standard diploma. 82
- At my child's IEP meetings we have talked about whether my child needed services beyond the regular school year. 56

Other Items (continued)

• My child's teachers set appropriate goals for my child.	83
• My child's teachers expect my child to succeed.	90
• My child's teachers give homework that meets my child's needs.	71
• My child's teachers call me or send me notes about my child.	77
• My child's teachers are available to speak with me.	89
• My child's school wants to hear my ideas.	76
• My child's school encourages me to participate in my child's education.	82
• My child's school informs me about all of the services available to my child.	63
• My child's school addresses my child's individual needs.	75
• My child's school makes sure I understand my child's IEP.	80
• My child's school explains what I can do if I want to make changes to my child's IEP.	66
• My child's school sends me information written in a way I understand.	80
• My child's school sends me information about activities and workshops for parents.	65
• I have attended one or more meetings about my child during this school year.	84
• I participate in school activities with my child.	66
• I am a member of the PTA/PTO.	28
• I belong to an organization for parents of students with disabilities.	13
• I have used parent support services in my area.	22
• I am comfortable talking about my child with school staff.	90
• I attend School Advisory Committee meetings concerning school improvement.	26

**Polk County School District
 Focused Monitoring Report
 Teacher Survey Results**

In order to obtain the perspective of teachers who provide services to students with disabilities, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, contracted with the University of Miami to develop and administer a teacher survey in conjunction with the Bureau’s focused monitoring activities. The survey was administered for the first time during the 2002 monitoring year.

Surveys were sent to all teachers at all schools in Polk County. Of the 5,232 surveys that were sent out, 689 were returned from 26 different schools, representing 13% of the sample. Percentages reported below are based on the numbers of respondents who replied that their school was “consistent” in the areas surveyed.

HIGH %
 (More than 75% of the respondents reported consistency in these areas.)

• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school develops IEPs according to student needs.	85
• To help students with disabilities who take the FCAT, my school provides students with appropriate testing accommodations.	84
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school conducts ongoing assessments of individual students' performance.	77
• To help students with disabilities who take the FCAT my school provides teachers with FCAT test preparation materials.	76

MIDDLE
 (More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents reported consistency in these areas.)

• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school makes an effort to involve parents in their child's education.	75
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school ensures that students with disabilities feel comfortable when taking classes with general education students.	71
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school places students with disabilities into general education classes whenever possible.	70
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school modifies and adapts curriculum for students as needed.	69
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school allows students to make up credits lost due to disability-related absences.	69
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school ensures that classroom material is grade- and age-appropriate.	65
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school addresses each student's individual needs.	65

Teacher Survey Results

MIDDLE (cont.) %
(More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents reported consistency in these areas.)

• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school provides positive behavioral supports.	64
• To help students with disabilities who take the FCAT, my school aligns curriculum for students with the standards that are tested on the FCAT.	61
• To encourage students with disabilities to stay in school, my school implements an IEP transition plan for each student.	61
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school ensures that classroom material is culturally appropriate.	61
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school ensures that the general education curriculum is taught in ESE classes to the maximum extent possible.	60
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school encourages participation of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities.	60
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school ensures that students are taught strategies to manage their behavior as needed.	55
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school encourages collaboration among ESE teachers, GE teachers and service providers.	53
• To help students with disabilities who take the FCAT, my school gives students in ESE classes updated textbooks.	53
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school provides social skills training to students as needed.	50
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school provides adequate support to GE teachers who teach students with disabilities.	48
• To ensure that as many students with disabilities as possible graduate with a standard diploma, my school encourages students to aim for a standard diploma when appropriate.	42
• To provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, my school offers teachers professional development opportunities regarding curriculum and support for students with disabilities.	42
• To ensure that as many students with disabilities as possible graduate with a standard diploma, my school informs students through the IEP process of the different diploma options and their requirements.	42
• To encourage students with disabilities to stay in school, my school provides students with information about options after graduation.	38
• To ensure that as many students with disabilities as possible graduate with a standard diploma, my school provides extra help to students who need to retake the FCAT.	34
• To keep students with disabilities from dropping out, my school implements a dropout prevention program.	30

Teacher Survey Results

MIDDLE (cont.) %
(More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents reported consistency in these areas.)

-
- | | |
|--|----|
| • To encourage students with disabilities to stay in school, my school provides students with job training. | 26 |
| • To encourage students with disabilities to stay in school, my school teaches transition skills for future employment and independent living. | 25 |

LOW
(Fewer than 25% of the respondents reported consistency in these areas.)

-
- | | |
|---|----|
| • To encourage students with disabilities to stay in school, my school coordinates on-the-job training with outside agencies. | 23 |
|---|----|

**Polk County School District
 Focused Monitoring Report
 Student Survey Results**

In order to obtain the perspective of students with disabilities who receive services from public school districts, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, contracted with the University of Miami to develop and administer a student survey in conjunction with the Bureau’s focused monitoring activities. The survey was administered for the first time during the 2002 monitoring year.

Surveys and administration scripts were sent to all schools in Polk County with students in grades 9-12. Surveys were sent out for 3,624 students. A total of 239 surveys were returned from 6 schools, representing 7% of the sample. The percentage of students who replied “yes” is reported below.

HIGH	%
(More than 75% of the respondents replied with “yes.”)	
• At my school, ESE teachers believe that ESE students can learn.	87
• At my school, ESE students are encouraged to stay in school.	84
• At my school, ESE teachers give students extra help, if needed.	83
• At my school, ESE students can take vocational classes such as computers and business technology.	82
• I know the difference between a regular and a special diploma.	81
• At my school, regular education teachers believe that ESE students can learn.	80
• At my school, ESE teachers teach students things that will be useful later on in life.	79
• I know what courses I have to take to get my diploma.	78
• At my school, ESE students fit in at school.	78
• At my school, ESE teachers give students extra time or different assignments, if needed.	78
• At my school, ESE students get the help they need to do well in school.	78
• At my school, ESE teachers teach students in ways that help them learn.	77
• At my school, regular education teachers teach ESE students things that will be useful later on in life.	76

MIDDLE	
(More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents replied with “yes.”)	
• I was invited to attend my IEP meeting this year.	75
• At my school, ESE students get work experience (on-the-job training) if they are interested.	75
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: Electives (physical education, art, music)	74

MIDDLE

%

(More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents replied with “yes.”)

• At my school, ESE students spend enough time with regular education students.	74
• I took the FCAT this year.	74
• At my school, ESE students get information about education after high school.	69
• I agree with the type of diploma I am going to receive.	69
• Teachers help ESE students prepare for the FCAT.	69
• At my school, ESE teachers understand ESE students' needs.	68
• At my school, ESE students participate in clubs, sports, and other activities.	67
• I attended my IEP meeting this year.	67
• At my school, regular education teachers teach ESE students in ways that help them learn.	65
• At my school, regular education teachers give ESE students extra help if needed.	64
• In my math classes, we work on the kinds of problems that are tested on the math part of the FCAT.	64
• At my school, ESE students are treated fairly by teachers and staff.	63
• At my school, regular education teachers understand ESE students' needs.	63
• In my English/reading classes, we work on the kinds of skills that are tested on the reading part of the FCAT.	62
• I had a say in the decision about which diploma I would get.	60
• At my school, ESE teachers provide ESE students with updated books and materials.	60
• I will probably graduate with a regular diploma.	59
• I received accommodations (special testing conditions) for the FCAT.	58
• I had a say in the decision about which classes I would take.	58
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: Math	58
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: English	58
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: Social Studies	57
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: Science	55
• At my school, regular education teachers give ESE students extra time or different assignments if needed.	54
• I am taking the following regular/mainstream classes: Vocational (woodshop, computers)	53
• I had a say in the decision about special testing conditions I might get for the FCAT or other tests.	49
• I am taking the following ESE classes: English	44
• I am taking the following ESE classes: Math	43
• I am taking the following ESE classes: Electives (physical education, art, music)	42
• I had a say in the decision about whether I need to take the FCAT or a different test.	30

MIDDLE

%

(More than 25% but fewer than 75% of the respondents replied with “yes.”)

• I am taking the following ESE classes: Science	30
• I am taking the following ESE classes: Social Studies	27

LOW

(Fewer than 25% of the respondents replied with “yes.”)

• I am taking the following ESE classes: Vocational (woodshop, computers)	4
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Appendix B- Monitoring Team Members

**Polk County School District
Focused Monitoring Report
ESE Monitoring Team Members**

March 18-22, 2002

Department of Education Staff

Iris Anderson, Program Specialist IV, Program Administration and Evaluation
Lee Clark, Program Specialist IV, Program Administration and Evaluation
Kelly Claude, Program Specialist IV, Program Administration and Evaluation
Kim Komisar, Program Specialist IV, Program Administration and Evaluation

Peer Reviewers

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Kathy Devlin, Sarasota County Schools
Jim Fowler, Broward County Schools
Renee Ginn, Seminole County Schools
Marcia MacKenzie, Pinellas County Schools
Rosemary Ragle, Okaloosa County Schools

Contracted Staff

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Maria Elena Arguelles, Researcher, University of Miami
Batya Elbaum, Project Director, University of Miami
Christopher Sarno, Researcher, University of Miami
Denise Stewart, Consultant to the Bureau

Appendix C- Glossary of Acronyms

Glossary of Acronyms

BECT	Business Education Club of Travis
Bureau	Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
CBI	Community Based Instruction
DOE	Department of Education
EH	Emotionally Handicapped
ESE	Exceptional Student Education
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
FDLRS	Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System
GE	General Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual Educational Plan
MIS	Management Information Systems
OJT	On-the-Job Training
PAES	Performance Assessment Expectation System
Pre-K (PK)	Prekindergarten
ROTC	Reserve Officers Training Corps
SED	Severely Emotionally Disturbed
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
VICA	Vocational Industrial Clubs of America

Appendix D- Forms Review

**Polk County School District
Focused Monitoring Report
Forms Review**

This form review was completed as a component of the focused monitoring visit conducted on March 18-22, 2002. We have compared the following forms to the requirements of applicable State Board of Education Rules, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), applicable sections of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations, and the Monitoring Work Papers/Source Book for 2002. The review includes recommended revisions based on programmatic or procedural issues and concerns. The results of the review are detailed below and list the applicable sources used for the review.

Parent Notification of Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Meeting

Form Meeting Notice

Source Book/Work Paper - IEP

Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.345

This form contains the components for compliance.

Individual Educational Plan (IEP) Meeting

Form Revised 10/00 Individual Educational Plan, Transition Individual Educational Plan

Source Book/Work Paper - IEP

Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.347

This form contains the components for compliance.

The following comment is made regarding this form.

- In regard to the phrase "...inform the team if you plan to bring an attorney or other persons to the meeting..." the notice requirements found in Section 300.344 specify that the team include... "at the discretion of the parent or agency, other individuals who have knowledge special expertise regarding the child..." There is no requirement that the parent inform the district of who will be accompanying the parents to the IEP meeting.

Notice and Consent for Initial Placement

Form ESE-08A (Rev 9/00) Informed Notice of Eligibility and Consent for Educational Placement (Prior Notice)

Source Book/Work Paper - Program Areas

Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Sections 300.503 and 300.505

This form contains the components for compliance; however, at the next preprinting of this form, the wording "reviewed and approved" needs to be revised to eliminate the phrase "*and approved.*" This change conforms to the requirement identified in the most recent Special Programs and Procedures document.

Informed Notice and Consent for Evaluation

Form *Notice and Consent for Evaluation/Re-evaluation*
Source Book/Work Paper -Evaluation
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Sections 300.503 and 300.505

This form contains the components for compliance.

The following comment is made regarding this form.

- The section that gives an explanation of why the district proposed or refused to take the action is not clear. It is recommended that the district consider strengthening this section to more clearly explain why the district proposed the action.

Informed Notice of Reevaluation
Form ESE 11 (Rev. 3/00) *Informed Notice Regarding Re-Evaluation*
Source Book/Work Paper - Reevaluation
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Sections 300.503 and 300.505

This form contains the components for compliance.

Notification of Change in Placement (and FAPE)
Form *Prior Written Notice*
Source Book/Work Paper - IEP
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.503

The following must be addressed.

- The section of the form that identifies dismissal as a result of a staffing committee could only be used for students identified as gifted. Since the reevaluation process must be used for students with disabilities prior to dismissal, and this process is the obligation of the IEP team, a decision regarding dismissal must be the result of the IEP meeting.

The following comment is made regarding this form.

- The information pre-printed in the “Other Relevant Information” section appears related to date and method of providing the notice. It is assumed that additional information factors could be recorded here.

Informed Notice of Refusal
Form *Informed Notice of Refusal to Take a Specific Action*
Source Book/Work Paper - IEP
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.503

This form contains the components for compliance.

Documentation of Staffing/Eligibility Determination

Form ESE-08 (Rev. 10/01) Staffing Committee Process Documentation
Source Book/Work Paper - Staffing, IEP
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Sections 300.534, 300.503

This form contains the components for compliance, however, at the next preprinting of this form, the wording “reviewed and approved” needs to be revised to eliminate the phrase “*and approved.*” This change conforms to the requirement identified in the most recent Special Programs and Procedures document.

Notice: Informed Notice of Dismissal
Form ESE-08 (Rev. 10/01) Staffing Committee Process Documentation
Source Book/Work Paper - Dismissal
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.503

The following must be addressed.

- The section of the form that identifies dismissal as a result of a staffing committee could only be used for students identified as gifted. Since the reevaluation process must be used for students with disabilities prior to dismissal, and this process is the obligation of the IEP team, a decision regarding dismissal must be the result of the IEP meeting.
- At the next preprinting of this form, the wording “reviewed and approved” needs to be revised to eliminate the phrase “*and approved.*” This change conforms to the requirement identified in the most recent Special Programs and Procedures document.

Notice: Not Eligible for Exceptional Student Placement
Form ESE-08 (Rev. 10/01) Staffing Committee Process Documentation
Source Book/Work Paper - Ineligible
Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulation Section 300.503

This form contains the components for compliance, however, at the next preprinting of this form, the wording “reviewed and approved” needs to be revised to eliminate the phrase “*and approved.*” This change conforms to the requirement identified in the most recent Special Programs and Procedures document.

The procedural safeguard form was reviewed and is in compliance.

The information you sent us regarding confidentiality of student records stated that the district has 45 days to comply with a request from a parent or adult student to review educational records. Rule 6A-1.0955, FAC, sets higher standards and requires that compliance with a request for a review of records must be made within 30 days. This will need to be corrected.