

FINAL REPORT: FOCUSED MONITORING VERIFICATION  
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

# BAKER COUNTY

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 1, 2005



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES

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March 18, 2005

Mrs. Wanda Walker, Director  
Exceptional Education and Student Services  
Baker County School District  
392 South Blvd East  
Macclenny, Florida 32063-2799

Dear Mrs. Walker:

Thank you for your hospitality during our recent verification monitoring visit, January 31 and February 1, 2005. During the visit, the district provided a comprehensive and well-prepared status report in response to the final monitoring report from the March 2003 focused monitoring visit. Visits to selected sites were conducted to verify information presented by the district. Bureau staff has reviewed additional information collected during the visit and a report of this visit is attached.

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

- discipline and classroom management
- staff development
- parental involvement

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

Sincerely,

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

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

cc: Paula T. Barton, Superintendent  
Eileen L. Amy  
Kim Komisar

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

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

**January 31 - February 1, 2005**

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

**January 31 - February 1, 2005**

On January 31 and February 1, 2005, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, conducted an on-site verification review of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs in Baker County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting verification visits to districts previously monitored is to afford school districts an opportunity to offer validation of the activities they have undertaken through their system improvement plans. These visits provide an assurance to the Bureau that the strategies agreed to in the improvement plans are being implemented. They also give districts an opportunity to demonstrate progress, as well as for districts to request additional technical assistance regarding the implementation of their system improvement plans.

Baker County was selected for monitoring in 2003 on the basis of the percent of students with disabilities who drop out of school. The results of the verification visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted March 31 – April 2, 2003:

- administration and policy
- curriculum and instruction
- discipline and classroom management
- staff development
- parental involvement
- gifted students
- student records reviews
- district forms review

## **Site Visit**

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

Information outlining all district activities related to the system improvement plan was prepared and presented to Bureau staff. Wanda Walker, Director, Exceptional Student Education and Student Services, served as the coordinator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. In addition, district staff David Davis, Susan Voorhees, Robin Mobley, Ann Watts, Clifford Pierce, and Kimberly Brannan participated in the presentation. These participants should be commended for a presentation that was thorough, well prepared, and well executed; the written documentation verified the information presented orally.

In addition to the district presentation, the verification visit included site visits to Baker County High School, Baker County Middle School, and Baker County Alternative School for the purpose of validating information provided during the district presentation. The visit also included compliance monitoring in the areas of individual educational plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities, matrix of services documents, the provision of services to gifted students, and additional compliance areas targeted by the Bureau for review (i.e., the provision of speech and language services; counseling as a related service, including psychological counseling; and, transition services). The site visit included:

- 20 interviews with selected school and district staff
- reviews of 18 IEPs for students with disabilities
- reviews of 6 EPs for students identified as gifted
- review of 2 matrix of service documents

## **Results**

### **Administration and Policy**

This section provides information related to general supervision and the implementation of policies and procedures that may have an effect on the dropout rate of students with disabilities in the district. Findings of noncompliance and concerns noted in the 2003 monitoring report in the area of administration and policy were related to data reporting, exclusion of students from class due to repeated minor infractions, implementation of the child study team, and transitional support for students articulating from one school to another. Additional concerns related to staff knowledge and training are addressed in the related categories. Strategies implemented to address specific concerns in the area of administration and policy included the following:

Inaccurate data reporting:

- ESE and MIS departments conducted a self-assessment of withdrawal codes for 100% of ESE students reported as dropping out in 2002-03
- training on data entry

Exclusion due to minor infractions:

- review of and revision to the student Code of Conduct; staff development on changes
- training on alternatives to in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS)
- review and analysis of three years of school specific ISS and OSS data to determine trends and the efficacy of strategies
- development of a five year ESE Strategic Plan to reduce discipline, increase student attendance, and increase the number and percentage of students graduating with a standard diploma

Implementation of the child study team:

- creation of a trans-disciplinary task force comprised of the student services director, select counselors, psychologist, attendance officer, behavior specialist, selected school administrators, selected teachers and consultant to review and modify child study team (CST) policies and procedures
- system-wide staff development on revisions to the CST procedures

Transitional support to students:

- implementation of procedures for sending and receiving guidance counselors to meet and develop written transition plans
- implementation of transition procedures for students placed at the alternative school and upon the return to the home school
- hiring a consultant to help in the development of a positive behavior management system implemented at the Alternative School

Interviews with school-level staff and reviews of student records at the visited schools verified the data presented by the district. The district has fulfilled the requirements of this category and should be commended in its continued efforts to ensure implementation of district policies and procedures that will decrease the likelihood of students dropping out.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

This section includes information related both to the curriculum provided to students with disabilities and to the setting, or least restrictive environment, in which instruction is provided. Concerns noted in the 2003 monitoring report in the area of curriculum and instruction were related to the lack of a coordinated curriculum plan across schools and grade levels, limited access to vocational programs for students with disabilities as a result of their relatively lower reading levels, and the number of students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes. The district has implemented the following strategies to address curriculum and instruction:

Coordinated curriculum plan:

- creation of a trans-disciplinary task force to study the issues surrounding curriculum
- adoption of a coordinated curriculum among Baker County Middle School, Baker County High School, and Baker County Alternative School
- alignment of all curriculum with the sunshine state standards
- identification of student performance levels upon placement at the alternative school

Access to vocational programs:

- staff development in the Florida Reading Initiative (FRI), math content, and inclusion environments
- exposure to grade level curriculum using differentiated instruction
- fostering communication among teachers and virtual learning team
- appointment of an assistant principal at each school responsible for curriculum
- implementation of modified occupational completion points
- increasing in class supports, including instructional assistants
- implementation of computer based curriculum in high school
- creation of a monthly district vocational newsletter highlighting available programs
- development of a teen business academy, Teen Vocational Companies (TVC), at the high school with two student owned businesses, “TVC Sweet Shoppe” and “TVC Textile Shoppe”
- plan to hire a job placement/employment specialist to help place students in jobs in their senior year
- securing over \$200,000 to provide school-based learning, after school enrichment, and summer enrichment programs all for students

Placement of students with disabilities in general education classes:

- creation of a special interest committee made up of general education and special education teachers
- development of a strategic plan in conjunction with district staff, school administrators, the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN), Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) and the special interest committee to promote more inclusion models
- use of ESE teachers as support facilitators or consultants
- based on IEP team recommendations, informing principals of each school of the number of inclusion classes needed
- use of an inclusion plan worksheet at each school
- collection and analysis of inclusion data from the middle and high schools

Documentation provided by the district prior to and during the on-site visit confirmed these activities. Staff should be commended for their efforts to ensure continuity of services and providing numerous opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in vocational courses.

During the course of the verification visit staff reported that, despite significant efforts to address the need to increase the number of students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes, there has been a limited increase in the number of students with disabilities placed in general education classes. The percentage of ESE students in general education classes (i.e., 80% or more of the school day with nondisabled peers) has remained essentially unchanged during the past three years (i.e., 2001-02: 53%; 2002-03: 52%; and 2003-04: 53%), although there has been a decrease in the number of students in separate class placement (i.e., less than 40% of the school day with nondisabled peers). The limited effectiveness of strategies designed to address general education class placement was reported by staff across the district to be due, in part, to the need for additional general education teachers trained in the inclusion model to expand efforts, as well as more special education teachers trained in the co-teacher and support facilitation models. In conjunction with the need for additional trained ESE and general education teachers, staff reported a need to have formal joint planning periods for co-teachers.

The district has fulfilled the requirements of this category and is encouraged to continue to investigate additional methods for expanding and enhancing its inclusion efforts.

### **Discipline and Classroom Management**

This section includes information related to classroom management as well as the implementation of school or district discipline policies. Concerns noted in the 2003 monitoring report in the area of discipline and classroom management were related to the use of student level data in the development of school-wide discipline plans and the development of behavior management strategies by the CST. The district has implemented the following strategies to address behavior/discipline:

- creating a trans-disciplinary task force to review the CST policies, procedures, and forms
- requiring teachers to collect, analyze, and use student level data to develop behavior management plans
- revising the CST policies and procedures
- hiring a consultant to evaluate the district's discipline policy and practices



- providing training on protocol procedures to all principals and assistant principals
- maintaining a portfolio on each school's identified needs on a district server and provide district-wide training on common areas identified
- encouraging staff at the middle and high school to prepare quarterly reports and self monitor their absenteeism and discipline referrals
- district-wide analyzing of the frequency, violation type, exceptionality, and percentage of discipline referrals

Through discussion with Bureau staff during the district's presentation, it was established that the district has a system in place to track the students who are referred to the CST for behavioral problems and for students who are being suspended. District staff have made significant efforts to ensure all staff are familiar with the discipline policy and procedures, however, there continues to be a relatively high suspension rate. The hiring of an outside consultant to evaluate discipline policies, procedures and practices demonstrates the district's commitment to finding a solution to this problem.

Interviews with school-level staff and reviews of student records indicate that, while staff is well versed in the district's policies and procedures on discipline, there continues to be variation across schools in the implementation of the plan, including which infractions warrant a referral.

The district has implemented all the system improvement plan strategies in this area. However, in addition to the continuation of staff training on the proper implementation of the district's discipline plan, the district is required to include the results of the outside evaluator's review of its discipline policies in their May 2005 status report, and to incorporate the findings from that report into its continuous improvement plan.

### **Staff Development**

This category refers to staff development activities that directly or indirectly target factors related to the dropout rate of students with disabilities. Concerns noted in the 2003 monitoring report in the area of staff development were related to ensuring that staff participate in appropriate training opportunities. Strategies implemented by the district to address training needs included the following:

- conducting a district-wide evaluation on staff development needs
- developing an ESE strategic plan detailing required trainings by discipline
- requiring each teacher to maintain a professional development portfolio
- exploring alternative methods (weekends, Saturday trainings) and incentives (stipends, additional benefits) to encourage greater staff participation in training opportunities
- offering district training at each school site
- providing updates regarding the Florida Reading Initiative
- training provided on data analysis, ESOL, and reading endorsement, among others
- offering distance learning training opportunities
- providing academic improvement plan/individual education plan training

Interviews with school-level staff verified the information presented by the district. While there is evidence of staff development opportunities, the majority of respondents reported a need for

general education teachers to be trained in the inclusion model, for more ESE teachers to be trained and utilized as co-facilitators, and for workshops on how to co-teach effectively.

The district has implemented all the system improvement plan strategies in this area. However, the district is required to incorporate training through the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) into its continuous improvement plan. The district is encouraged to continue its efforts toward expanding the capacity of staff to implement inclusive models.

### **Parental Involvement**

This category refers to parent involvement as it relates directly to the dropout rate of students with disabilities, as well as parent involvement overall. Concerns noted in the 2003 monitoring report in the area of parental involvement were related to parent's involvement in the middle and high school years. Strategies implemented by the district to address in this area included:

- establishing a trans-disciplinary task force to address the need to increase parental involvement, student achievement, and dropout prevention
- conducting a parent survey on training needs
- recruiting parents to help evaluate the needs of the school
- providing a copy of the parent handbook to each parent at the beginning of the school year
- providing parents with information on how they can assist the student at home
- implementing the Home Loan Program, which allows students to borrow lap top computers to access FCAT explorer at home, books, and other educational programs
- providing each student with a school planner that requires weekly parental viewing of student progress and giving students extra credit for having their planners signed
- hosting grade level parent nights and open house yearly
- recognizing student achievers during community school board meetings
- encouraging staff to have positive parental contact
- implementing the parent link phone system that informs parents when the student is absent
- promoting family reading night and offered stipends to parents for attending trainings
- creating a parent newsletter, parent guide, and brochures on parental involvement
- expanding the range of information provided in the tri-annual ESE newsletter

District staff provided documentation that, while every effort has been made to get parents more involved, they have been more successful in getting parental involvement with extracurricular activities such as serving as chaperones than in increasing attendance at IEP meetings. School-level staff reported conducting home visits, making after hour phone calls, and sending notes via students and United States mail to keep parents informed. Despite the efforts of the district and school level staff, records reviewed indicate that when parents are not in attendance at the IEP meeting, their input may not be included in the development of the IEP (input from 1 out of 9 parents not in attendance was documented on the IEP). For the records reviewed on-site, parents attended 4 of 6 meetings (67%) at Baker County Middle school and 5 of 12 meetings (42%) at Baker County High School.

District staff should be commended for their efforts and continued dedication to increasing parent involvement. The district has implemented all the system improvement plan strategies in

this area. However, the district is required to add additional strategies and goals in its continuous improvement plan to address parent participation in IEP meetings (i.e., phone conference calls, etc.).

### **Services to Gifted Students**

This section provides information related to the district's gifted program across all grade levels. There were no findings in this area. The district is currently addressing dropout rate in its continuous improvement plan for gifted students. The districts current dropout rate for gifted students is 0%. District staff should be commended for their efforts and continual dedication in this area.

### **Student Records Review**

This section provides information related to the compliance of IEPs with state and federal requirements. Findings in the 2003 final monitoring report in the area of student records were related to: lack of measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks; lack of notice that the purpose of the meeting for students aged 14 and older will include a discussion of transition needs; lack of documentation that the parent received a copy of the IEP if the parent did not attend the meeting; no indication of which IEP team member served as the interpreter of instructional implications; and, the present level of educational performance statement, annual goals, and short-term objectives or benchmarks do not support the services on the IEP. Strategies implemented by the district to address the area of student records include the following:

- providing school-based IEP training with a focus on measurable annual goals and short-term objectives and benchmarks, matrix reporting, the computerized IEP system, and the appropriate use of accommodations and modifications
- requiring program specialists from the district to attend all IEP meetings to ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal requirements

Bureau staff reviewed 18 records of students with disabilities during the verification visit. Of the IEPs reviewed, 16 (89%) had a majority of measurable annual goals and two did not. The district was provided with student-specific information related to this finding via letter dated March 4, 2005. The IEP teams for these students will be required to reconvene to develop measurable annual goals. Documentation must be submitted to the Bureau by April 30, 2005.

While 12 of the IEPs reviewed were for students aged 14 or older, none (0%) of the parent notices to the IEP meeting included the consideration of transition as a stated purpose. The district will be required to provide staff with training on accurately and completely identifying the purpose of an IEP meeting on parent notices and must review all Transition IEPs conducted between March 21, and May 15, 2005 at Baker County Middle School and Baker County High School to determine if transition was indicated on the notice of meeting. The results of this review must be included in the May 2005 status report.

For two (11%) of the 18 IEPs reviewed, parents were not in attendance and there was no documentation that they received a copy of the student's IEP. The district was provided with student-specific information related to this finding via letter dated March 4, 2005. The district is required to submit evidence with the May 2005 status report documenting that the identified parents have received copies of the IEPs.

Four (22%) of the 18 records did not document which IEP team member served as the interpreter of instructional implications. It is recommended that the district continue to provide training on this topic and conduct internal reviews of its records to ensure that the roles of all participants are accurately documented on the IEPs.

In all of the records (100%) reviewed, annual goals, and short-term objectives or benchmarks supported the services on the IEP. The district and school staff should be commended on its efforts in this area.

The district and school level staff have made some improvement in the documentation of student records, though they are not in full compliance. The required self monitoring and continual training of staff should assist in bringing them into compliance.

In addition to IEP reviews, the Bureau conducted a review of two matrix of service documents for students reported at the 254 funding level. One was found to be inaccurately reported. The district is required to provide an amendment to the data provided to the Department of Education (DOE) through the Automated Student Information System database for survey 5 for the 2003-04 school year and surveys 1, 2, and 3 for the 2004-05 school year. The district was provided with student-specific information related to these findings via letter dated March 4, 2005.

#### **District Forms Review**

All required corrections regarding district forms have been completed.

#### **Additional Compliance**

In addition to monitoring categories related to the 2003 final report, the Bureau also conducted interviews related to the provision of speech and language services and counseling as a related service and transition. School-level staff interviewed reported that communication goals are written for students who have a need in the area of communication, and that the ESE teacher would provide instruction and/or support in that area. Three of the 18 records indicated that the student had a need in the area of communication and included a goal, objectives, or specially designed instruction in the area of communication. None of the three IEPs included speech or language as a related service.

District and school staff reported that counseling services are provided to students who demonstrate the need for such services, including students with disabilities as well as non-disabled students. The district has a contract with the Dr. Davies Group to provide psychological and mental health counseling. Both group and individual counseling are available, depending on the needs of the individual student. It was reported that counseling services are indicated on the IEP. The records for one student in the program for students who are severely emotionally disturbed (SED) and six records for students in the program for students who are emotionally handicapped (EH) were reviewed. In each record (100%) reviewed, either counseling or mental health counseling was provided and was included on their individual education plan as a related service.

Regarding transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school living, school-level interviews and student record reviews revealed the district's difficulty in consistently having an outside agency to attend transition IEP meetings on students 16 or older. Staff consistently reported that though there have been numerous attempts to establish a working relationship, the rapid staff turnover in outside agencies and the district's location relative to the more populated Jacksonville/Duval County area makes it extremely difficult. Three records for students 16 years of age or older were reviewed; there was no indication that an outside agency was invited to these meetings.

## **Summary**

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services conducted a verification monitoring visit to Baker County District Schools on January 31 and February 1, 2005. The visit served to verify that the district has implemented the strategies of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in March 2003. District and school level staff should be commended on their efforts and improvements in the targeted areas.

The district was provided with student-specific information related to findings requiring corrective actions via a letter dated March 4, 2005, and is required to provide documentation that the following corrective action activities have been completed. Evidence of completion must be submitted with the district's May 2005 status report indicating the following:

- development and implementation of IEP training that focuses on identified areas of need
- targeted self-monitoring of parent notice of transition IEP team meetings

In addition, the district is asked to incorporate the results of the outside evaluation of its discipline policies, staff development, and parental involvement into its continuous improvement plan. The revised plan must be included with the district's continuous improvement status report submitted in May 2005. The district is encouraged to continue its efforts in the areas of curriculum and instruction, gifted services, and transition services for students 16 years of age and older.

Through a district presentation by Wanda Walker, David Davis, Susan Voorhees, Robin Mobley, Ann Watts, Clifford Pierce, and Kimberly Brannan, the district demonstrated improvement in all areas. While the district has completed the strategies of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2003 monitoring report, the district must submit a final status report in May 2005 related to this plan. The revision to the continuous improvement plan will serve to ensure that the district will continue to meet the requirements of the provision of services to exceptional students.