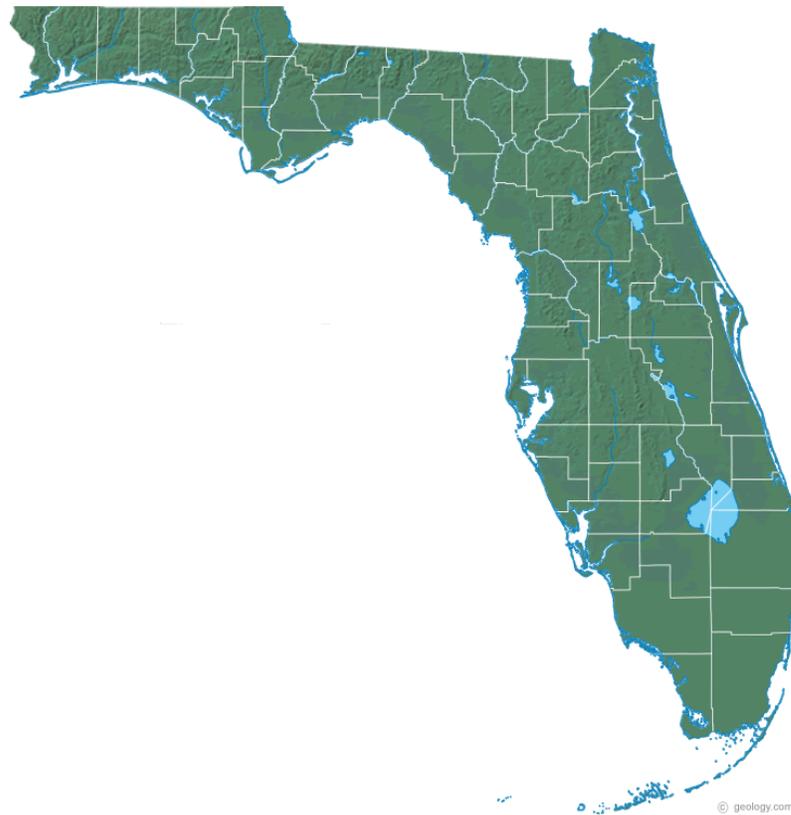


Escambia County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs

February 22–25, 2011



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education

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April 26, 2011

Mr. Malcolm Thomas, Superintendent
Escambia County School District
215 West Garden Street
Pensacola, Florida 32502

Dear Superintendent Thomas:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Escambia County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district February 22–25, 2011, including student record reviews, interviews with school and district staff, and classroom observations. The final report will be posted on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services' website and may be accessed at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp>.

The Escambia County School District was selected for an on-site visit due to a pattern of poor performance over time as indicated in the State Performance Plan (SPP) indicator one, percent of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma, and SPP indicator two, percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school. Ms. Teri Szafran, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Director, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and during the on-site visit.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services to exceptional education students in Escambia County. If there are any questions regarding this final report, please contact Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance, at (850) 245-0476 or via electronic mail at Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org.

Sincerely,

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

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

Enclosure

cc: Teri Szafran
Kim Komisar
Patricia Howell

Liz Conn
Anne Bozik

BAMBI J. LOCKMAN
Chief

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

**Escambia County School District
Final Report: On–Site Monitoring
Exceptional Student Education Programs**

February 22–25, 2011

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

Escambia County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring SPP 1: Graduation and SPP 2: Dropout Exceptional Student Education Programs February 22–25, 2011

Table of Contents

Authority	1
Monitoring Process	1
District Selection.....	1
SPP Indicators 1 and 2	2
On-Site Activities.....	2
<i>Monitoring Team</i>	2
<i>Schools</i>	2
<i>Student Focus Groups</i>	3
<i>Data Collection</i>	3
<i>Review of Records</i>	3
Results.....	3
Commendations	4
Concerns	4
Findings of Noncompliance	5
Corrective Action.....	6
Technical Assistance.....	7
Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations	8

Escambia County School District
Final Report: On-Site Monitoring
SPP 1: Graduation and SPP 2: Dropout
Exceptional Student Education Programs
February 22–25, 2011

Final Report

Authority

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (Bureau), in carrying out its roles of leadership, resource allocation, technical assistance, monitoring, and evaluation, is required to oversee the performance of district school boards in the enforcement of all laws and rules related to exceptional student education (ESE; sections 1001.03(8) and 1008.32, Florida Statutes [F.S.]). One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) is to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (section 300.1(d) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]). In accordance with IDEA, the Bureau is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Act and the educational requirements of the State are implemented (34 CFR §300.149(a) (1) and (2)).

In fulfilling this requirement, the Bureau monitors ESE programs provided by district school boards in accordance with sections 1001.42 and 1003.57, F.S. Through these monitoring activities, the Bureau examines and evaluates procedures, records, and ESE services; provides information and assistance to school districts; and otherwise assists school districts in operating effectively and efficiently. The monitoring system is designed to emphasize improved educational outcomes for students while ensuring compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations and state statutes and rules.

Monitoring Process

District Selection

Districts were selected for on-site monitoring during the 2010–11 school year based on the following criteria:

- Matrix of services:
 - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 150 percent of the state rate for **at least one** of the following:
 - 254 (> 7.38 percent)
 - 255 (> 3.15 percent)
 - 254/255 combined (> 10.53 percent)
 - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 125 percent of the state rate for **two or more** of the following cost factors:
 - 254 (> 6.15 percent)
 - 255 (> 2.63 percent)
 - 254/255 combined (> 8.78 percent)

- Pattern of poor performance over time in one or more targeted SPP indicators, as evidenced by demonstrated progress below that of other targeted districts, and at least one of the following:
 - Targeted for a given SPP indicator or cluster of indicators for three consecutive years
 - Targeted for two or more SPP indicators or clusters of indicators for two consecutive years
- Problem solving/response to intervention (PS/RtI)
 - Eligible for on-site monitoring based on matrix of services or a pattern of poor performance over time on SPP indicators
 - Status as a pilot district for PS/RtI implementation; extent of implementation thus far

SPP Indicators 1 and 2

In accordance with 34 CFR §300.157(a)(3), each state must have established goals in effect for students with disabilities that address graduation rates and dropout rates. In addition, there are established performance indicators to assess progress toward achieving the established goals. SPP Indicator 1 relates to the percent of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma. SPP Indicator 2 relates to the percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.

In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Escambia County School District superintendent was informed that the district was selected for a Level 3 on-site visit due to a pattern of poor performance over time regarding SPP Indicators 1 and 2.

On-Site Activities

Monitoring Team

The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit from February 22–25, 2011:

- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Co-Team Leader)
- Liz Conn, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Co-Team Leader)
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Mary Sue Camp, Consultant, Exceptional Student Education
- Sheila Gritz, Program Specialist, Program Development

Schools

The following schools were selected for on-site visits:

- Bellview Middle School
- Jim Bailey Middle School
- Escambia Charter School
- Pine Forest High School
- Escambia High School
- Juvenile Detention Center

Student Focus Groups

Ten students from three schools participated in student focus groups conducted by Bureau staff. These students were selected from the group of students chosen for case studies. The students discussed their knowledge and experiences related to the following:

- IEP team meetings
- Current ESE services, including transition services
- Extracurricular activities
- Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and diploma options
- Dropout prevention
- Suspension and expulsion
- Job training
- Postsecondary education

Data Collection

IEPs for 28 randomly selected students with disabilities enrolled in grades six through 12 in the Escambia County School District were reviewed regarding regulatory requirements determined to be most closely related to graduation and dropout rates of students with disabilities. In addition, the following monitoring activities were conducted:

- District-level interview – 6 participants
- School-level interviews – 18 participants
- Student focus groups – 10 participants
- Case studies – 15 students

Review of Records

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

- Current IEP
- Previous IEP
- Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)/behavioral intervention plan (BIP), if any
- Discipline record
- Attendance record
- Report cards
- Any other supporting documentation as needed

Information from each document was used to determine compliance with those standards most likely to impact ESE services provided to students not graduating from high school with a standard diploma and the percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.

Results

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

Commendations

During the course of the on-site visits, it was noted that each of the schools was orderly and well organized, in addition to presenting a positive environment for learning. Principals were very supportive of students and staff. School staff members displayed a high level of professionalism and commitment, and were extremely accommodating to Bureau staff. All schools provided credit retrieval programs to older students. In addition, the following specific strengths related to SPP 1 and SPP 2 were identified:

- Commitment to dropout prevention was evidenced at Bellview Middle School through a flexible schedule that accommodates student needs; the “failure is not an option” policy requiring students to make up work rather than get an F on their report cards; the Guidance Advisement class that provides extra support to students as well as Violence Prevention activities; a block schedule to maximize class time; mentorship of at-risk students; and extra support in sixth grade because of transition issues. Jim Bailey Middle School was notable for its emphasis on learning strategies. Escambia Charter School and Escambia High School were notable for student access to the College Reach Out Program (CROP). In addition, Pine Forest High School was noted for emphasizing hands-on learning opportunities that engage students.
- Commitment of school staff to support and encourage positive behavior in students was evident in the effective use of positive incentive programs at Jim Bailey Middle School, Bellview Middle School, Escambia High School, Pine Forest High School, and the Juvenile Detention Center; and by the emphasis on personal responsibility at Escambia Charter School.
- Commitment to parent support was evident at each school. Noteworthy practices include access to teachers when parents pick up report cards at Escambia Charter and Bellview Middle Schools; the use of funds at Bellview Middle School to transport parents to various school functions; the parent library at Escambia High School; the practice of surveying parents after parent/teacher conferences at Pine Forest High School; and the opportunity for parents to attend special meetings regarding special education issues at Jim Bailey Middle School.
- Notable efforts to prepare students for successful post-school experiences include opportunities at Bellview Middle School for students to care for alpacas and to run a fish farm; weekly opportunities for juniors and seniors at Pine Forest High School to meet with representatives of Vocational Rehabilitation; and the chance for students to participate in Career Day at Escambia Charter School.

Concerns

The following concerns were noted during discussions with district and school personnel and through record reviews:

- Although the course of study was addressed on the students’ transition IEPs, it was generally not descriptive and instead reflected the diploma option decision requirement.
- Some statements of present levels provided a minimum amount of information and could be strengthened with clearer descriptors of the student’s progress in the general curriculum.
- The term “specialized instruction” described under special education services could be strengthened by more clearly identifying the nature of the services being provided.

Findings of Noncompliance

Student-specific information needed for correction of noncompliance was provided to the district under separate cover. Noncompliance with the following standards was identified:

- The IEP includes measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the student's needs that result from the disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and meet the student's other needs that result from the disability. Benchmarks or short-term objectives should be included for students with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards or any other student with a disability as determined by the IEP team. (34 CFR §300.320(a)(2))
 - In fifteen of 28 records reviewed, the annual goals were not measurable.
 - *Note:* Following the on-site visit, all 15 IEPs were revised and correction was verified by the Bureau.
- If a student has had at least five unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a calendar month or ten unexcused absences, or absences for which the reason is unknown, within a 90-calendar-day period, the student's primary teacher must report that the student may be exhibiting a pattern of nonattendance. Unless there is clear evidence otherwise, the student must be referred to the school's child study team. If an initial meeting does not resolve the problem, interventions must be implemented. (Section 1003.26(1), F.S.)
 - In seven of 28 records reviewed, the student's attendance pattern was not reported for consideration of a pattern of nonattendance.
 - *Note:* Following the on-site visit, the noncompliance was corrected and verified by the Bureau for five of the seven students. Correction is pending for the remaining two students.
- The IEP team considered, in the case of a student whose behavior impedes his or her learning, the use of positive behavioral interventions, supports, and/or other strategies to address the behavior. (34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(i))
 - In one of 28 records reviewed, the use of positive behavioral interventions, supports, and/or other strategies to address behavior issues was not evident.
 - *Note:* Following the on-site visit, this IEP was revised and correction was verified by the Bureau.
- There is a measurable postsecondary goal or goals in the designated areas (i.e., education/training, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills). (34 CFR §300.320(b)(1); Rule 6A-6.03028(3)(h)10.a., Florida Administrative Code [F.A.C.])
 - In one of 28 records reviewed, postsecondary goals were incorrectly written, indicating what the student *would like to do* rather than what the student *will do*.
 - *Note:* Following the on-site visit, this IEP was revised and correction was verified by the Bureau.
- The IEP had been reviewed at least annually, and revised as appropriate, to address: any lack of progress toward the annual goals; any lack of progress in the general curriculum, if appropriate; the results of reevaluation; information about the student provided to, or by, the parent; and/or the student's anticipated needs or other matters. (34 CFR §300.324(b)(1))
 - In one of 28 records reviewed, the prior IEP had lapsed for 10 days.
 - *Note:* The school district had already found this error and corrected it.

Corrective Action

The district has corrected the student-specific noncompliance for 23 of the 25 incidents noted above. **No later than May 10, 2011**, the Escambia County School District must reconvene the IEP teams or school attendance teams for the remaining students to correct the identified noncompliance. With the agreement of the parent and the district, an IEP may be amended without a meeting. If individual correction is not possible, the district must identify the policy, procedure, or practice that caused the noncompliance and provide evidence of the action taken to ensure future compliance. In addition, **no later than May 31, 2011**, the district must:

- **Either** demonstrate 100 percent compliance with the indicators in question through review of a random sample of five IEPs developed after February 25, 2011,
- **Or** submit to the Bureau a corrective action plan (CAP) detailing the activities, resources, and timelines the district will employ to ensure that the compliance target of 100 percent will be met **no later than March 15, 2012**. The CAP **must** include a periodic review of a random sample of five records developed after February 25, 2011, for the five standards of identified noncompliance to be conducted until such time as the district demonstrates 100 percent compliance.

Technical Assistance

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding IEP development can be found in the *Exceptional Student Education Compliance Manual 2010–11*. Technical assistance related to graduation rates and dropout prevention can be accessed through Project10: Transition Education Network at <http://www.project10.info/> and the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) at <http://www.nsttac.org>.

Bureau Contacts

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

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

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CAP	Corrective action plan
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CROP	College Reach Out Program
ESE	Exceptional student education
F.A.C.	Florida Administrative Code
FBA	Functional behavioral assessment
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
NSTTAC	National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center
PS/RtI	Problem solving/response to intervention
SPP	State Performance Plan



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

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