

FINAL REPORT OF VERIFICATION MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

NOVEMBER 9, 2004



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES
ESE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

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February 10, 2005

Mrs. Debra Land, Director
Exceptional Student Education
Lafayette County School District
Route 2, Box 5
Mayo, Florida 32066

Dear Mrs. Land:

Thank you for your hospitality during our recent verification monitoring visit, November 9, 2004. During the visit, the district provided a comprehensive and well organized status report in response to the final monitoring report from the October 7-9, 2002 focused monitoring visit. Visits to selected sites were conducted to verify information presented by the district. Bureau staff has reviewed the 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 2002 monitoring visit, the district must submit a final status report in May 2005 related to this plan.

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

Sincerely,

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

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

cc: Fred Ward
Eileen Amy
Kim Komisar

BAMBI J. LOCKMAN
Chief

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

**Lafayette County Final Monitoring Report
Verification Monitoring Visit
November 9, 2004**

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Lafayette County School District Verification Monitoring Visit November 9, 2004

On November 9, 2004, 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 Lafayette County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting verification visits to districts previously monitored two years previously 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.

Lafayette County was selected for monitoring in 2002 on the basis of the percentage of students with disabilities who spend more than 80% or more of their day with nondisabled peers, and developed a system improvement plan (SIP) to address specific concerns and/or findings of noncompliance noted by the Bureau at that time. The results of the verification visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted in 2002:

- staff training and knowledge
- placement
- curriculum and instruction
- behavior and discipline
- stakeholder opinions related to the key data indicator
- record and forms reviews

Additional areas addressed during this verification visit include the following:

- the provision of counseling as a related service
- addressing the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech or language impaired
- school to post-school transition

Site Visit

Debra Land, Director of Instructional & Personnel Services, served as the coordinator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. Ms. Land and Gina Hart, staffing specialist, described the district's strategies for implementing the system improvement plan during interviews with Bureau staff.

In addition to the district level interviews, the verification visit included site-visits to the district's two schools: Lafayette Elementary School (K-5) and Lafayette High School (6-12). The purpose of these visits was to validate information provided by the district and

in the semi-annual status reports submitted to the Bureau. The visit included the following activities:

- 16 interviews with selected district and school staff at the two schools
- reviews of nine IEPs for students with disabilities, including matrix reviews for two of those students
- reviews of six EPs for students who are gifted

Results

Staff Training and Knowledge

This section includes information related to specific training provided to school or district staff that may be expected to have an impact on the placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. There were no concerns and/or findings of noncompliance from the 2002 monitoring report related to staff training and knowledge, and staff reported that significant staff development opportunities have continued to be provided on a variety of topics.

All teachers in Lafayette County have participated in trainings related to multiple intelligences and multicultural learning styles. The sessions on multiple intelligences have occurred at least four times within the past two years. Some of the specific trainings cited by both special education and general education teachers as being effective were the Florida Reading Initiative (FRI) training, the Creating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies (CRISS) training, Kagan training on classroom management, and various sessions on effective instruction and remediation. Staff development also was provided in a variety of ways to address the cultural diversity of students in the district. All teachers in the district are required to complete the 300 hour ESOL training (English for speakers of other languages), due to a recent increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino families relocating to the district. It was reported by the school staff that these trainings have provided many examples of accommodations and modifications that can be used to teach students with a variety of learning methods.

Placement

This section includes information related both to the continuum of placements available for students with disabilities as well as the decision-making process related to placement in the least restrictive environment. There were no concerns and/or findings of noncompliance from the 2002 monitoring report related to placement.

Curriculum and Instruction

This section includes information related to the curriculum provided to students with disabilities, including the manner in which students are prepared for participation in the general statewide assessment. Findings from the 2002 focused monitoring visit to Lafayette County were related to students with disabilities at the elementary level in segregated classrooms receiving appropriate Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) preparation materials or training and to the provision of instructional accommodations to students with disabilities at the high school level.

Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the area of curriculum and instruction indicated that instructional accommodations are not provided consistently to students with disabilities at Lafayette High School. Findings from the 2002 report also indicated that students with disabilities served for the majority of their school day in an ESE classroom at Lafayette Elementary School did not consistently receive FCAT preparation materials or training.

Since the monitoring visit in 2002, the schedule for the middle grades (grades 6-8) at Lafayette High School has been revised, and now includes a 6-period day rather than a 4-period block schedule. Middle school students with disabilities are included in the general social studies and science classes each day, and an accommodations sheet is provided to general education teachers by the special education teachers to work with students who need accommodations. The principal reported that changing the schedule to a six period day has facilitated the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. During the site-visit to the high school there was evidence that instructional accommodations are being provided more consistently to students with disabilities than they were two years ago, and the staff continues to focus on this area.

The high school grade levels (9-12) remain on a block schedule. School staff reported that a greater proportion of high school students with disabilities are pursuing a standard diploma than in the past, and those students are enrolled in general education courses. It was reported that awareness of the use of accommodations for the high school students has increased in part due to greater opportunities for communication between ESE and general education teachers. High school teachers also stated that in addition to receiving an accommodations sheet for their ESE students, they also become aware of the accommodations that students need by attending the IEP meetings. However, the principal is aware that a more conscious effort has to be made to send ESE students into the general education setting due to the current block scheduling.

At Lafayette Elementary School staff reported that all students are included in appropriate FCAT preparation activities. It was reported that including the performance of students with disabilities in accountability measures has facilitated this change. For the 2004-05 school year there is a daily 90-minute reading block, and students with disabilities who are taking the FCAT participate in with their nondisabled peers for this period. Students with disabilities who are participating in the FCAT are also involved in training that targets the writing portion of the FCAT. At the time of this visit, that included all students in the school who were eligible for the programs for specific learning disabilities (SLD) and educable mentally handicapped (EMH). A review of assessment participation documented on the IEPs (FCAT or alternate assessment) revealed no findings of noncompliance regarding the application FCAT exemption criteria.

Behavior and Discipline

This section includes information related to classroom management as well as to implementation of school or district discipline policies. There were no findings from the 2002 monitoring report related to behavior and discipline.

Records Reviews

This section refers to findings resulting from the compliance reviews conducted by Bureau staff. During the 2002 monitoring visit there were systemic findings of noncompliance related IEPs in the following areas:

- lack of indication of transition as a purpose of meeting
- lack of transition page and diploma option decision
- lack of documentation of progress toward annual goal
- lack of indication that the results of state- or district-wide assessment was considered in the development of the IEP

During the verification visit nine IEPs for students with disabilities were reviewed, including matrix reviews for two of those students. In addition, six EPs for students who are gifted were reviewed. There were no findings of noncompliance with federal or state requirements in these reviews.

District Forms Reviews

This section refers to forms used by the district to document a variety of processes and procedures related to the provision of services to exceptional students. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report indicated that eight forms required revision. These forms were revised and the revisions were approved in May, 2003. There were no additional findings in this area.

Additional Compliance

In addition to monitoring categories related to the 2002 final report, the Bureau also investigated the provision of counseling as a related service, the way in which the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech impaired or language impaired are addressed, and secondary school to post-school transition planning for students with disabilities.

Staff reported that counseling, including psychological counseling, as a related service is available to all ESE students who are in need of such service, including gifted students. At the time of the verification visit there were no students served in the program for students who are severely emotionally disturbed. For students in the program for students with emotional handicaps, a review of a random sampling of records indicated that counseling is provided as a related service and is documented on the IEP. Counseling is provided by both school staff and contracted agencies such as the White Foundation and Meridian Behavioral Services, depending on the specific needs of the individual students. Staff reported that there is open communication between the counselors and the school staff regarding the students' progress with the counseling they are currently receiving, whether provided by school staff or contracted agencies.

Regarding addressing the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech or language impaired, staff reported that the needs of such students are addressed by the ESE and/or general education classroom, although communication goals generally would not be included on the IEPs of these students. Communication skills generally are incorporated into the existing instructional areas

during the school day. The ESE teachers and district staff also stated that the district's speech and language pathologist is available for informal consultation whenever needed, and serves as a valuable resource. The district will be required to incorporate into its continuous improvement plan training to address all the needs of the student, including communication needs of students not eligible for programs for speech or language impaired, in the development of IEPs.

Regarding school to post-school transition planning for students with disabilities, staff reported that this is an area the district continues to strive to address. In part due to the rural nature of the district, most of the resources from Vocational Rehabilitation are located in other nearby cities and are not available locally. Staff reported that it is challenging to get participation from Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies, even though they are consistently invited to transition IEP meetings. All students are provided with information regarding options for what is available to them after high school graduation. All students, including students in ESE, participate in the job fair. Career counseling is available to students from individuals who travel to Lafayette County from community colleges and agencies located neighboring districts, such as Suwannee, Taylor, Columbia, and Hamilton Counties.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, conducted a verification monitoring visit to Lafayette County District Schools on November 9, 2004. The visit served to verify that the district has met all requirements of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit October 7-9, 2002, and to demonstrate the district's continued efforts and improvement in a variety of areas related to exceptional student education.

Additional areas investigated during this verification visit that were not addressed during the 2002 visit included the provision of counseling, including psychological counseling, as a related service, the way in which the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech impaired or language impaired are addressed, and secondary school to post-school transition planning for students with disabilities. The only finding of noncompliance evident through these activities was related to communication needs. The district is required to incorporate into its continuous improvement plan targeted IEP training to address all the needs of the student, including communication needs of students not eligible for programs for speech or language impaired, in the development of IEPs. This revision to its continuous improvement plan must be implemented within 60 days, with documentation provided to the Bureau with the district's status report submission of May 30, 2005.