

Monroe County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs

January 11-14, 2011



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education

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April 6, 2011

Dr. Joseph P. Burke, Superintendent
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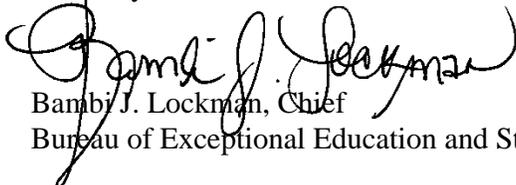
Dear Superintendent Burke:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Visit of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Monroe County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district January 11–14, 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 Monroe County School District was selected for an on-site visit due to a pattern of poor performance over time as indicated in State Performance Plan (SPP) indicator four: Rates of Suspension and Expulsion. Dr. Lesley Salinero, Executive Director, Student Services and Curriculum, 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 for exceptional education for students in Monroe 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,



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

Enclosure

cc: Lesley Salinero
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Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

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Exceptional Student Education Programs**

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Table of Contents

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

Monroe County School District
Final Report: On-Site Monitoring
SPP 4: Suspension and Expulsion
Exceptional Student Education Programs
January 11–14, 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 State Performance Plan (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 Indicator 4

In accordance with 34 CFR §300.157(a)(3) and (b), each state must have established goals in effect for students with disabilities that address graduation rates and dropout rates as well as established performance indicators. SPP Indicator 4 relates to rates of suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities.

Disciplinary policies are set at the district level and are guided by Rules 6A-6.03312 and 6A-6.0527 of the Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). Because of the variance in district disciplinary policies, Florida determines significant discrepancy by comparing the rates of suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities and nondisabled students within a district. Significant discrepancy is defined as a risk ratio of three or higher.

Data were obtained from Florida's automated student database at the student level for rate and duration of suspension and expulsion. Rates of suspension and expulsion were calculated for each district for students with disabilities and nondisabled students by dividing the number of students with suspensions or expulsions greater than 10 days by total year enrollment as reported at the end of the school year. Risk ratios were calculated for each district by dividing the rate of suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities by the rate of suspension and expulsion for nondisabled students. Although Monroe's 2009–10 data reflected a low number of suspensions overall, the data revealed that students with disabilities were suspended more frequently than nondisabled students.

In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Monroe 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 Indicator 4. In September 2010, SPP Indicator 3 (Assessment), Indicator 4 (Rates of Suspension/Expulsion), and Indicator 5 (Least Restrictive Environment) were integrated and revised criteria were established for identification of targeted districts. Based on this revision, Monroe County School District was no longer targeted for the 2010–11 school year. As a result, the on-site visit was designed to verify implementation of improvement activities and ongoing compliance with related requirements.

On-Site Activities

Monitoring Team

The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit from January 10–14, 2011:

- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance
- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance

Schools

The following schools were selected for on-site visits:

- Key West High School
- Academic Connections for Excellence (ACE)
- Sugarloaf School
- Marathon Middle/High School

Student Focus Groups

Thirteen students from four 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 school and district discipline policies and procedures. The students who participated in the focus groups appeared to be aware of the disciplinary process and the resources available in their schools.

Data Collection

Individual educational plans (IEPs) for 18 randomly selected students with disabilities enrolled in grades six through 12 in the Monroe County School District were reviewed regarding procedures related to suspension and expulsion. In addition, the following monitoring activities were conducted:

- District-level interview – 3 participants
- School-level interviews – 20 participants
- Records reviewed – 18 students
- Focus groups – 13 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
- Additional 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 who are suspended or expelled.

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

The following commendations apply to all of the schools visited:

- Positive atmosphere; well-organized schools; well-maintained facilities
- Highly-organized presentation of student records to facilitate review by Bureau staff
- Strong administrative leadership reflecting interest and involvement with students' individual needs
- High level of professionalism and commitment demonstrated by school staff
- High expectations for student behavior
- Collaboration among staff members evident regarding monitoring of individual student progress and needs
- Effective use of technology in the classrooms
- Opportunity for students to make up work when serving in-school-suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS)
- Commitment to keeping ESE students on campus and engaged in the learning environment (e.g., assigning to ISS rather than OSS as much as possible)
- Effective communication with parents, including multiple methods for parental involvement

The following commendations apply specifically to Key West High School:

- Universally high expectations for student behavior
- Highly recommended and valued Transition to Independence, Employment and Success (TIES) Program
- Innovative instruction observed in classrooms
- Mentoring and monitoring of struggling students; home- and work-site visits by teachers
- School rules reported by focus group students to be very clear and consistently enforced

The following commendations apply specifically to ACE:

- Leadership displayed by students helping new students orient to the school setting
- Opportunity for students to showcase positive attitudes regarding available opportunities and future plans through "Seminar, Leadership, Research, and Learning Strategies"
- Blue Ridge International Academy online delivery system for homework and credit retrieval
- Positive reward system linked to students' self-determined goals
- "Teaching Over Management" used to engage students academically and improve classroom behavior
- Strategies focused on alleviating test anxiety

The following commendations apply specifically to Sugarloaf School:

- Positive behavior support (PBS) incentive tickets; reinforcer inventories completed by students; use of student conferences in conjunction with and as an alternative to suspension
- Efforts to ensure consistency among student discipline reports and reports derived from School-Wide Information System (SWIS) and Total Educational Resource Management System (TERMS); monitoring of data patterns related to suspension, grades, and attendance
- Inclusion of “reason for referral” in discipline data shared schoolwide to focus on prevention
- Strong staff commitment to PS/RtI, including classroom infraction reports that document steps taken to intervene and hypotheses regarding the identified behavior

The following commendations apply specifically to Marathon Middle/High School:

- “Start on Time Program” focused on deterring tardiness to class
- Tracking of individual students’ behavioral data, with one-on-one meetings with teacher or assistant principal as needed; meet with parents to address attendance
- Effective positive behavior program using “Dolphin Dollars” made at the school by students in the varying exceptionalities (VE) classroom
- School-based enterprises operated by ESE students (e.g., selling herbs grown in a greenhouse purchased with grant funding; operating a laundry service for school staff)
- Increased monitoring by administrators and ESE paraprofessionals during lunch and transition times to deter behavioral problems
- “Catch up Contract” to help students make up assignments or earn a higher grade; monitoring of students earning Ds and Fs so that programs can be implemented to improve grades

Concerns

The following concerns were noted during the on-site visit, including discussions with district and school personnel:

- Although students in the majority of classrooms visited were orderly and engaged in the assigned activities, the climate in one ISS classroom appeared disruptive and not conducive to student learning. The principal described specific plans for strengthening the effectiveness of this classroom.
- Based on recent discipline referrals for two students whose records were reviewed, the team recommended to school staff that the IEP teams consider the need for a BIP or other positive behavioral supports.
- Participants in the student focus group at one school reported concerns regarding behaviors and interventions on a specific school bus. The district’s behavioral specialist described plans to follow up with the district transportation department regarding PBS training for bus drivers.
- There was no evidence of IEP team meetings being scheduled to address students who continue to earn Ds and Fs; however, the principal is instituting ways to address the issue schoolwide.
- There is inconsistency in the reporting of suspension as an excused or unexcused absence.

Findings of Noncompliance

Noncompliance with the following standard was identified in four of the 18 records reviewed. Student-specific information needed for correction of noncompliance was provided to the district under separate cover in a letter dated January 28, 2011.

- 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)10a, F.A.C.)

The IEPs of the four students in question were revised to include measurable postsecondary goals and provided to the Bureau on February 4, 2011, thereby correcting the student-specific noncompliance. This correction of noncompliance was validated by the Bureau.

Corrective Action

As a corrective action, the district was required to demonstrate 100 percent compliance with the standard in question through review of a random sample of five IEPs developed after January 14, 2011. The district submitted documentation of this corrective action on February 28, 2011. The district has completed the requirements related to this monitoring visit.

Technical Assistance

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, can be found in the *Exceptional Student Education Compliance Manual 2010–11*.

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

ACE	Academic Connections for Excellence
BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
F.A.C.	Florida Administrative Code
FBA	Functional behavioral assessment
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
ISS	In-school-suspension
OSS	Out-of-school suspension
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
PS/RtI	Problem solving/response to intervention
SPP	State Performance Plan
SWIS	School-Wide Information System
TERMS	Total Educational Resource Management System
TIES	Transition to Independence, Employment and Success
VE	Varying exceptionalities



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

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