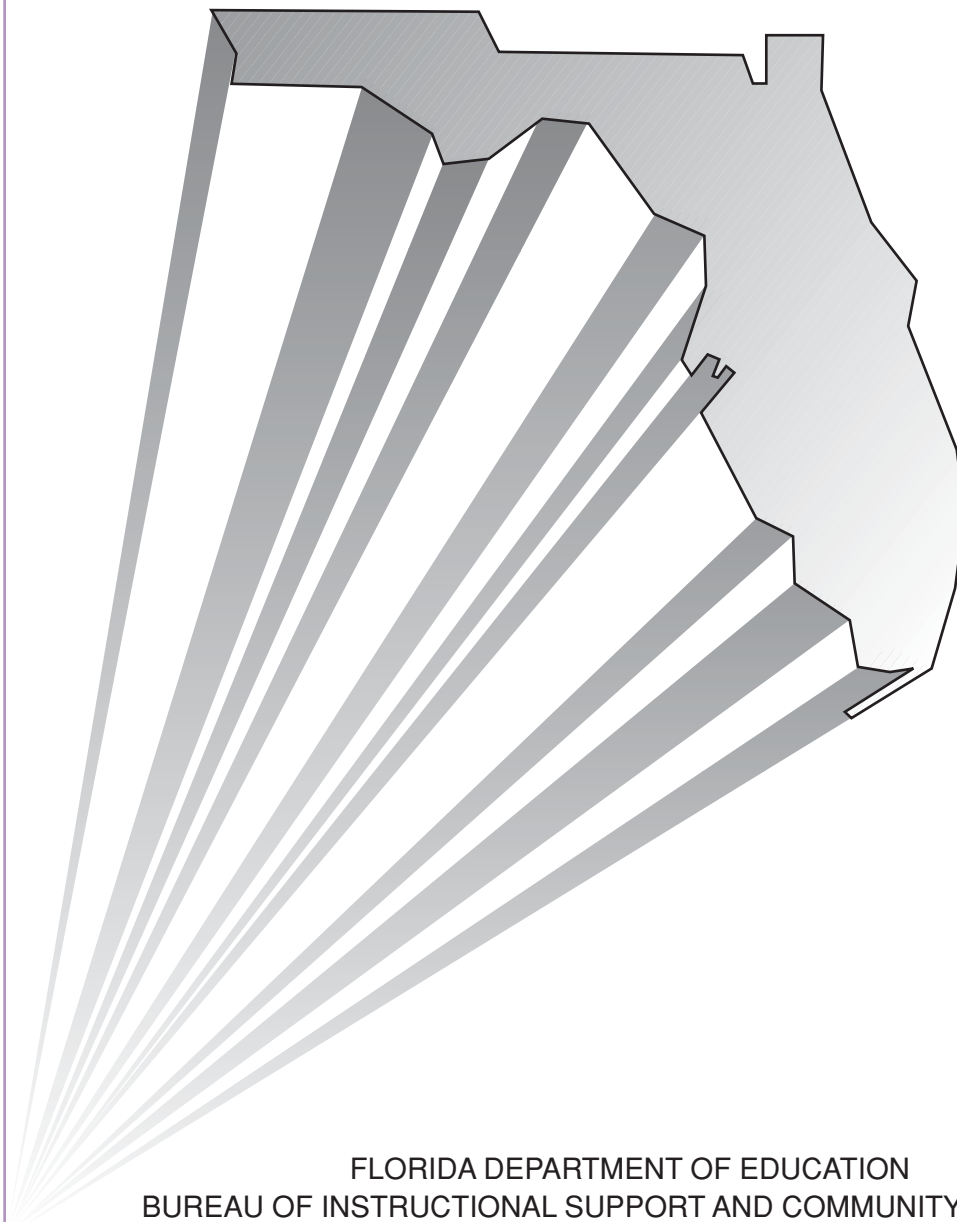


FINAL REPORT OF FOLLOW-UP MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

OSCEOLA COUNTY

SEPTEMBER 16 - 17, 2003



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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November 3, 2003

Ms. Penny Collins, Director
Exceptional Student Education
Osceola County School District
805 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, Florida 34744

Dear Ms. Collins:

Thank you for your hospitality and professionalism during our recent follow-up monitoring visit, September 16-17, 2003. During the visit, the district provided a status report in response to the final monitoring report from the April 2001 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.

The district has fulfilled the requirements of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2001 monitoring visit. You are not required to submit an additional status report. However, the district is required to address findings related to the following topics addressed in the report:

- participation in statewide assessment (exemption criteria)
- general supervision (charter school compliance)

Strategies and outcome measures that address these areas of concern must be included in the continuous improvement monitoring plan status report to be submitted in December 2003.

We appreciate your ongoing efforts on behalf of exceptional students.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Shan Goff.

Shan Goff

cc: Blaine Muse
Eileen Amy
Michele Polland

SHAN GOFF
K-12 Deputy Chancellor for Student Achievement

Osceola County School District Follow-Up Monitoring Visit September 16-17, 2003

During the week of September 15, 2003, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, conducted an on-site follow-up review of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs in Osceola County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting follow-up 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.

Osceola County was selected for monitoring in 2001 on the basis of the percent of students with disabilities participating in Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The results of the follow-up visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted April 23-26, 2001:

- participation in statewide assessment
- general supervision
- parent participation
- least restrictive environment
- gifted services
- child find
- transition from Part C to Part B programs
- secondary transition
- access to general curriculum

Site Visit

The primary on-site activity conducted as part of the follow-up monitoring visit was a demonstration by the district of the strategies implemented thus far through the system improvement plan developed as result of the 2001 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.

The demonstration by Osceola County included presentations related to the implementation of strategies identified in the system improvement plan based on categories from the final monitoring report. Penny Collins, Director, Exceptional Student Education, served as the coordinator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. In addition, the following district staff participated in the presentation: Susan Harris, Debra Winget, Dr. Anita Avery, Dr. Magali Zeiters, Linda Schroder-King, and Juan Gomez. 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 follow-up visit included visits to Thacker Avenue Elementary School, Osceola High School, Denn John Middle School, and Kissimmee Charter Elementary 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, educational plans (EPs) for students identified as gifted, and the provision of counseling as a related service and speech and language services. School site visits included the following:

- nine interviews with selected school staff
- five classroom observations
- reviews of EPs for students identified as gifted
- reviews of 19 IEPs for students with disabilities

Results

Participation in Statewide Assessment

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of participation in statewide assessment were related to the decision-making process. Strategies implemented to address the area of participation in statewide assessment included the following:

- staff development related to various alternate assessments
- staff development related to accommodations and modifications
- communication with parents, principals, exceptional student education (ESE) and general education teachers, and resource compliance specialists (RCS) regarding student participation in statewide assessment
- creation of a 354 page manual entitled “Strategies for Learning” tied to the Sunshine State Standards for Standard Diploma
- staff development related to “Strategies for Learning”

As a result of these efforts, tremendous improvement has been made in the area of participation in statewide assessment. District staff presented evidence of an increase in the percent of students who participate in FCAT and a decline in the percent of students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessments. In 2001, 34% of students with disabilities in Osceola County participated in an alternate assessment while during the 2003 administration of statewide assessment this number had decreased to 9%.

Interviews with school-level staff and reviews of student records at the visited schools verified the data presented by the district. There were several alternate assessments identified by interviewees as being used in the district. In addition, it appears that the decision to exempt students from FCAT is being made for the appropriate students. However, interviewees were not able to articulate the requirements for exemption based on State Board Rule 6A-1.0943(1)(a)(1.-2.). The district will be required to address the need for further staff development in the area of decision-making related to participation in statewide assessment in its continuous improvement monitoring plan.

General Supervision

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of general supervision were related to IEP compliance. Strategies implemented by the district to address compliance in the area of IEPs included the following:

- training for teachers and RCS related to compliant IEPs
- compliance reviews of every IEP developed in the district
- revision of district forms
- development and implementation of computerized IEPs

The district presentation included a demonstration of the use of the computerized IEP. This demonstration highlighted the built-in components of the program designed to limit the likelihood that human error results in noncompliance. The district also provided documentation of staff training related to writing measurable goals and objectives.

School visits verified the use of the computerized IEPs. The results of training were evident; the majority of the records reviewed were compliant in all areas identified as being noncompliant in the 2001 final report. With the exception of records at the charter school, reviews revealed that the majority of annual goals were measurable.

At the charter school, the following issues will need to be addressed:

- measurable annual goals
- correspondence between present level of performance and goals and objectives
- review of goals from previous IEP during the development of new IEP to ensure that goals have been met, or if the goals are continued, are addressed with a different level of service
- provision of progress reports
- provision of services as stated on the IEP (e.g., OT)
- certification of teacher providing services to gifted students

The district will be required to address the issues related to compliance at the charter school through its continuous improvement monitoring plan.

Parent Participation

Findings and areas of concern from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of parent participation included the lack of parent notice in the parents' native language, concerns of parents were not consistently documented on the IEP, and parents' perceptions of the availability of information. Strategies implemented by the district to address these areas include the following:

- parent notices were developed in Spanish as well as English
- random reviews of IEPs were conducted to ensure that parent concerns were documented
- numerous parent activities were held to provide information and assistance to parents (conducted in English and Spanish)
- parent surveys were provided to gain parent input

Documentation by the district included copies of the notices, a report of the random IEP reviews, and lists of parent workshops with the number of participants included. The presentation by the district parent liaison provided explanations of the parent activities and data related to parent workshops. A review of the data reveals that school-based parent activities are better attended

than those activities planned for parents district wide. The district also indicated that there is a continued need to provide activities to encourage increased parent participation.

Visits to the selected school sites verified the use of dual-language parent notices, as well as dual language on all forms of the IEP. Record reviews verified the documentation of parent concerns in the development of IEPs. Visits also confirmed parent activities; at one site, the RCS said participants representing over 300 of the school's 639 students attended the most recent parent night. The district has fulfilled all requirements of this category and should be commended in its continued efforts to increase parent participation.

Least Restrictive Environment

The only finding from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of least restrictive environment (LRE) was that there was inadequate documentation of the explanation of the extent to which students will not participate with nondisabled peers. According to the 2003 local education agency (LEA) profile, 48% of students with disabilities in the district are served in the regular class placement (80% or more of the day with nondisabled peers). This is equal to the state average. In addition, 50% of the students identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) are served in separate class placement (less than 40% of the day with nondisabled peers). This is below the state average of 61%. Strategies implemented by the district to address this area included:

- parent conferences to provide information regarding placement options
- training for teachers in this area

The district has completed all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan and record reviews indicated improvement. However, several of the randomly reviewed IEPs contained weak or vague statements to explain why a student will not participate with nondisabled peers. Continued improvement in this area is expected.

Gifted Services

Although there were no findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of the provision of gifted services, the district prepared a presentation to address its continuous improvement monitoring plan. The district has implemented the following strategies to address underrepresentation in the gifted population:

- provided training to guidance counselors and ESL compliance specialists to identify the characteristics of gifted children
- established Gifted Child Study procedures
- provided resource information to parents of gifted children
- collected referral data
- met with school principals to gain support for gifted referrals from their schools
- hired bi-lingual psychologist to conduct evaluations

Data provided by the district indicated that it exceeded its annual benchmark for the gifted continuous improvement plan. The district should be commended for its efforts in this area and is encouraged to continue them.

Child Find

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of child find were related to the documentation of parent receipt of evaluation reports and determination of eligibility. In its system improvement status report to the Bureau prior to the on-site visit, the district provided the form developed to document parent receipt of evaluation reports and eligibility determination. It also sent documentation of training for RCS related to the use of the forms. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Transition from Part C to Part B Programs

There were no findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of transition from Part C to Part B programs.

Secondary Transition

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of secondary transition were related to inadequate course of study statements for students beginning at age 14. In addition, there was a lack of documentation of agency invitation to transition IEPs. Prior to the on-site visit, the district provided documentation of training related to transition issues, on-going random reviews of student records focusing on the transition components, and the development of an invitation form for agency participation. During on-site record reviews, evidence of agency participation was found. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Access to the General Curriculum

The only finding from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of access to the general curriculum was that IEPs contained inadequate statements indicating how a student's disability affected his involvement in the general curriculum. In its status report prior to the visit, the district provided documentation of training for district and school-level staff and random self-assessment related to this finding. On-site record reviews revealed compliance in this area. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Additional Compliance

In addition to monitoring categories related to the 2001 final report, the Bureau also conducted interviews related to the provision of speech and language services and counseling as a related service. Through interviews and record reviews, it appears that the speech and language needs of students are being met. Only speech/language pathologists write goals in the communication domain; however, classroom teachers address students' language needs if students have not met eligibility criteria for a language disability. During the interview process and district debriefing, staff were informed that classroom teachers may write goals to address the communication needs of students. The district continues to seek technical assistance in the area of speech and language. Program Specialist, Lezlie Cline, was in the district to provide training to speech/language pathologists and RCSs during the time the monitoring visit was being conducted.

It appears that referrals to outside agencies for counseling services are routinely provided to students with disabilities who are in need of such services, although school staff reported that these services would not be documented on the IEP. In contrast, district staff reported that there are several interagency agreements in place to provide these services, and that any counseling services determined by the IEP team to be necessary should be reflected on the IEP. The district

must ensure that information regarding this procedure be disseminated to teachers as part of ongoing IEP training activities. In addition, social workers and school counselors routinely provide group and individual counseling to all students in the schools, in which case the service would not be indicated on the individual IEP.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services conducted a follow-up monitoring visit to Osceola County District Schools during the week of September 15, 2003. The visit served to verify that the district had adequately met all requirements of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in April 2001. Through presentations and on-site visits, the district demonstrated improvement in all areas. All requirements have been met in the following categories:

- parent participation
- least restrictive environment
- gifted services
- child find
- transition from Part C to Part B programs
- secondary transition
- access to general curriculum

Areas in which continued improvement is required must be addressed in the district's continuous improvement monitoring plan. Strategies and outcome measures addressing these areas must be reported in the status report submitted in December 2003. The areas demonstrating continued need are as follows:

- participation in statewide assessment (exemption criteria)
- general supervision (charter school compliance)