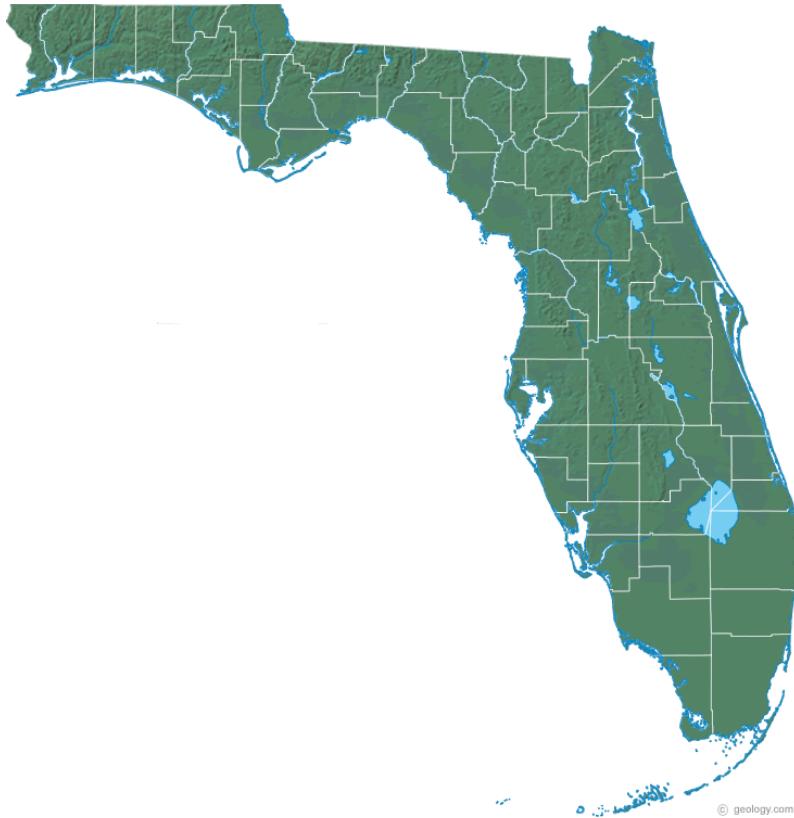


Sarasota County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs

February 8–11, 2011



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Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education

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April 12, 2011

Ms. Lori White, Superintendent
Sarasota County School District
1960 Landings Boulevard
Sarasota, Florida 34231

Dear Superintendent White:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Visit of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Sarasota County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district February 8–11, 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 Sarasota 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. Ms. Sonia Figaredo-Alberts, Director of Pupil Support Services, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and during the on-site visit. The principals and other school staff members also welcomed and assisted Bureau staff.

The Bureau's on-site monitoring activities identified some discrepancies that require corrective action. Identifying information regarding student noncompliance was sent previously.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Sarasota 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: Kathy Devlin Kim C. Komisar Patricia Howell Jill Snelson

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

Sarasota County School District

**Final Report: On-Site Monitoring
Exceptional Student Education Programs**

February 8–11, 2011

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

Sarasota County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring SPP 4: Suspension and Expulsion February 8–11, 2011

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Sarasota County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring SPP 4: Suspension and Expulsion February 8–11, 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 (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. In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Sarasota 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.

On-Site Activities

Monitoring Team

The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit from February 8–11, 2011:

- Jill Snelson, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Mary Sue Camp, Consultant, Monitoring and Compliance
- Liz Conn, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance

Schools

The following schools were selected for on-site visits:

- Booker High School
- Booker Middle School
- Brookside Middle School
- Oak Park School
- Oak Park South
- Wilkinson Elementary

Student Focus Groups

Eight students from two 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 34 randomly selected students with disabilities enrolled in grades kindergarten through 12 in the Sarasota County School District were reviewed regarding procedures related to suspension and expulsion. Monitoring activities included the following:

- District-level interview – 7 participants
- School-level interviews – 40 participants
- Records reviewed – 34 students
- Focus groups – 8 students
- Case studies – 21 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-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 Booker High School:

- Crisis prevention technique used for immediate student access to selected teacher through use of “flash pass”
- Positive expectations for all students in spite of community challenges
- Saturday detention used for academic reinforcement and enrichment instead of as a punitive measure
- Partnership with Community Haven provides exposure to career opportunities
- Teacher/student mentorship

The following commendations apply specifically to Booker Middle School:

- Suspension rates decreased 27 percent in last two years
- Partnership with Jewish Family Services’ program Challenge to Change, which includes family therapeutic component
- Positive Behavior Support (PBS) implemented throughout the school
- Numerous activities directed at increasing family involvement
- Self-advocacy taught through social/personal drama course

The following commendations apply specifically to Brookside Middle School:

- Strong self-advocacy demonstrated by students during the focus group
- Caring school environment demonstrated through the fund-raising activity
- Emphasis placed on inclusive programs

The following commendations apply specifically to Oak Park School:

- Data-driven decision making
- Ongoing teacher training
- Teachers’ awareness of students’ academic and behavioral issues

The following commendations apply specifically to Oak Park South:

- Highly effective Conscious Discipline program
- Ongoing teacher training
- Data-driven decision making
- Daily parent contact
- Use of therapy dogs
- Sensory integration activities
- Ongoing incentive activities

The following commendations apply specifically to Wilkinson Elementary School:

- Graphing used to track student behavior, and data is shared during regular staff meetings
- Ongoing teacher training
- Activities used to increase family involvement
- Ongoing incentive activities implemented through PBS

Concerns

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

- Use of outdated disability language on students' IEPs
- Inconsistent use of PBS in some of the schools
- Credit for work made up during OSS is not uniformly given from teachers
- Misaligned attendance and suspension data
- Involvement of probation officer has caused confusion regarding who is responsible for follow-up of attendance issues
- Annual goals for some students based on the specific disability determination rather than the needs of the students (this is reflected in the noncompliance section below)

Findings of Noncompliance

Noncompliance with the following standards was identified in seven of the 34 records reviewed:

- A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability. (34 CFR §300.320(a)(2))
 - Identified in three records
- An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class. (34 CFR §300.320(a)(5))
 - Identified in two records

Note: Following the on-site visit, one of these records was corrected and verified.

- On the date on which the decision is made to make a removal that constitutes a change of placement of a child with a disability because of a violation of a code of student conduct, the local education agency (LEA) must notify the parents of that decision, and provide the parents the procedural safeguards notice. (34 CFR §300.530(h))
 - Identified in one record
- Within 10 school days of any decision to change the placement of a child with a disability because of a violation of a code of student conduct, the LEA, the parent, and relevant members of the child's IEP Team (as determined by the parent and the LEA) must review all relevant information in the student's file, including the child's IEP, any teacher observations, and any relevant information provided by the parents to determine if the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the child's disability; or if the conduct in question was the direct result of the LEA's failure to implement the IEP. The conduct must be determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability if the LEA, the parent, and relevant members of the child's IEP Team determine that a condition in either of this section was met. If the LEA, the parent, and relevant members of the child's IEP Team

determine the condition in this section was met, the LEA must take immediate steps to remedy those deficiencies. (34 CFR §300.530(e))

- Identified in one record
- Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. (34 CFR §300.320(b)(1))
 - Identified in one record

Student-specific information needed for correction of noncompliance was provided to the district under separate cover in a letter dated March 7, 2011.

Corrective Action

No later than May 3, 2011, the Sarasota County School District must reconvene the IEP teams for the students noted above and correct the identified noncompliance. With the agreement of the parent and the district, the 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 June 3, 2011**, the district must:

- **Either** demonstrate 100 percent compliance with the indicators in question by reviewing a random sample of five IEPs developed after February 11, 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 7, 2012**. The CAP **must** include a periodic review of a random sample of five records developed after February 11, 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 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

BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CAP	Corrective action plan
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
LEA	Local education agency
OSS	Out-of-school suspension
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
PS/RtI	Problem solving/response to intervention
SPP	State Performance Plan



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

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