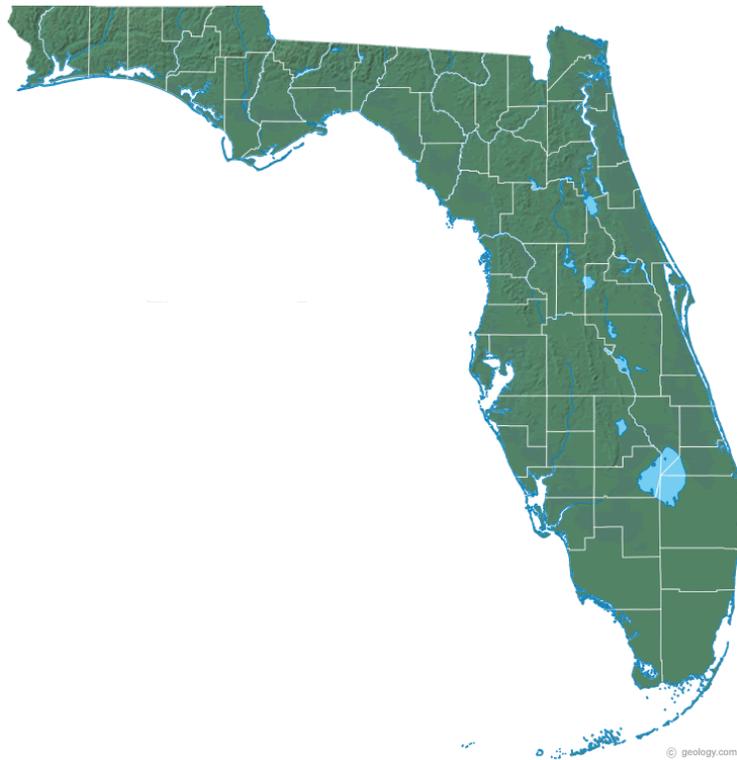


Suwannee County School District

Final Report: On-Site Monitoring Exceptional Student Education Programs

November 15–18, 2010



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education

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January 28, 2011

Mr. Jerry A. Scarborough, Superintendent
Suwannee County School District
702 2nd Street NW
Live Oak, FL 32064

Dear Superintendent Scarborough:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Suwannee County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district November 15–18, 2010, which included 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 Suwannee 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) indicators one and two: percent of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma and percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school. In addition, the district's implementation of a problem solving/response to intervention (PS/RtI) process was reviewed during the on-site visit. Mrs. Elizabeth Simpson, Director of Student 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 staff members at the schools visited, welcomed and assisted Bureau staff members. The Bureau's on-site activities identified some discrepancies that required corrective action, and also identified strengths and targets for support within the district's PS/RtI processes.

BAMBI J. LOCKMAN

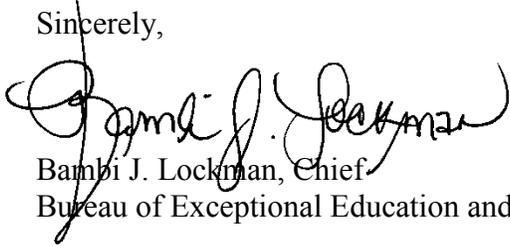
Chief

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Mr. Jerry A. Scarborough
January 28, 2011
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Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Suwannee 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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

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

Enclosure

cc: Elizabeth Simpson
Tracy Crutchfield
Paul Des Jardines
Kim C. Komisar
Patricia Howell
Jill Snelson

Suwannee County School District

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

November 15–18, 2010

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

Suwannee County School District

**Final Report: On-Site Monitoring
SPP 1: Graduation and SPP 2: Dropout
Problem Solving/Response to Intervention**

November 15–18, 2010

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Suwannee County School District

On-Site Monitoring SPP 1: Graduation and SPP 2: Dropout Problem Solving/Response to Intervention

November 15–18, 2010

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

In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Suwannee 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 as indicated in SPP 1, percent of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma, and SPP 2, percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school. In addition, the district's implementation of a PS/RtI process was to be reviewed during the on-site visit.

On-Site Activities

Monitoring Team

During November 15–18, 2010, Bureau staff members conducted an on-site visit to discuss strategies in place to address graduation rates and dropout rates. Bureau members also met with district staff to discuss the district's implementation of a PS/RtI process as it carries out its child find obligation to identify and evaluate students suspected of having a disability. The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit:

- Jill Snelson, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Mary Sue Camp, Consultant, Exceptional Student Education
- Heather Diamond, Program Specialist, Program Development and Services
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Sheila Gritz, Program Specialist, Program Development and Services
- Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance

Schools

The following schools were selected for the review of records related to SPP 1 and SPP 2:

- Branford High School
- Suwannee High School
- Suwannee Middle School

The following schools were visited related to PS/RtI:

- Suwannee Elementary School
- Suwannee Primary School
- Branford Elementary School

Data Collection

SPP 1 and SPP 2 on-site activities included the following:

- District-level interview – 4 participants
- School-level interviews – 28 participants
- Case studies – 6 students enrolled in grades six through twelve

PS/RtI on-site activities included the following:

- District-level interview – 4 participants
- School-level interviews – 33 participants
- Case studies – 12 students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grade five

Review of Records

The district was asked to provide the following documents for each of the 30 student records selected for the SPP 1 and SPP 2 reviews:

- 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

The district was also asked to provide documentation related to the PS/RtI process for 18 students in three schools who had been evaluated during the past year. This information was used to examine implementation of PS/RtI across the district.

Results

The following results reflect the data collected through the activities of the on-site visit as well as strengths, concerns, targets of support, findings of noncompliance, and recommendations.

Strengths

The following comments apply to all of the schools visited:

- Pleasant, orderly, and well-organized schools
- High level of professionalism and commitment of school staff members
- High level of collaboration among staff members from all areas
- Collaboration with other organizations, such as 21st Century
- Use of online courses for overage students and credit retrieval for high school students

In addition, the on-site team noted the following regarding individual schools visited:

- Suwannee Middle School:
 - Staff mentors for identified at-risk students

- Credit advancement for eighth-grade students
- Collaboration with mental health agencies
- Suwannee High School:
 - Continuity of support and collaboration, despite staff turnover
 - Collaboration among ESE and general education teachers
 - Recognition breakfast held for all students
- Branford High School:
 - Students demonstrating high level of self-advocacy skills
 - Behavior management program used within in-school suspension
 - Staff mentors for identified at-risk students
- Branford Elementary School:
 - Documentation of data-driven decisions using multiple sources
 - Strong administrative leadership
 - Staff provided with extended training activities and opportunities for practice
 - Use of schoolwide behavioral incentives
- Suwannee Elementary School:
 - “Widening the Circle” classes demonstrating increased use of inclusion
 - Use of individual student data notebooks
 - Administration focused on effective implementation of PS/RtI
- Suwannee Primary School:
 - Use of behavioral incentives
 - Intervention planning includes students who demonstrate a need for acceleration or enrichment
 - Color-coded individual student intervention charts

Concerns/Targets for Support

SPP 1 and SPP 2

The following challenges and areas in need of additional support or technical assistance were noted during discussions with school and district staff and through record reviews:

- The district has implemented the Focus Student Information System to track student grades and attendance. Some schools have experienced technical difficulties with the system, which may result in inaccurate data collection. Although the system automatically generates notices to parents when students are absent, the notices are not dated when sent. A more accurate record of attempts to improve student attendance would be available if the notices were dated.
- Due to lack of transportation options, students who attend school in the southern section of the county do not have the same access to vocational programs as students who attend school in other parts of the county.
- Out-of-school suspension is not always implemented in a consistent manner.
- Amended IEPs may not be easily understood regarding the revised portion.

PS/RtI

The following challenges and areas in need of additional support or technical assistance were noted during discussions with school and district staff and through record reviews:

- As implementation of PS/RtI results in the identification of effective instructional strategies and behavioral interventions, there may be a decrease in the number of students found

eligible for ESE services. If there is a concomitant decrease in funding, there may not be sufficient funds available to cover the fixed costs of some programs.

- Effective problem solving is a foundation for increasing student performance and requires teams to devote a significant amount of time analyzing and addressing the needs of groups of students as well as individual students. Finding sufficient time for all team members to meet is a challenge. In addition, strategies are needed to increase parent participation in and understanding of the process.
- Additional activities to develop and support consensus building for PS/RtI are needed, as evidenced by the perception among some staff that PS/RtI is primarily an ESE process. It was noted that some of the forms the district used to document PS/RtI include terminology that may foster this (e.g., general education interventions implemented for the purpose of meeting pre-referral requirements). Some school staff expressed discomfort with the reliance on problem-solving teams to base decisions regarding the duration of interventions on students' response, and preferred to have explicit timelines established. In addition, there was concern that the focus on student performance data resulted in criticism or judgment regarding teacher effectiveness.
- Infrastructure support in the way of district- and school-based leadership team training is recommended to ensure effective administrative support is available to school-based problem-solving teams.
- Training in implementation of the problem-solving process itself continues to be a need. Specific topics on which to focus include the following:
 - Developing and testing hypotheses across multiple domains
 - Using graphical representations to present data
 - Analyzing the gap between the performance of a given student and the benchmarks and between a given student and peer groups
 - Implementing consistent and effective methods for documenting PS/RtI to ensure that an accurate record exists for each student while not imposing an undue burden on team members
 - Ensuring that identification and evaluation of students suspected of having a disability is timely and that implementation of PS/RtI does not inadvertently delay the evaluation process

Findings of Noncompliance

SPP 1 and SPP 2

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

- 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.)
 - Identified in one of 13 records reviewed

- The student was invited to the IEP team meeting. (34 CFR §300.321(b)(1))
 - Identified in one of 13 records reviewed

PS/RtI

There were no findings of noncompliance regarding implementation of the PS/RtI process.

Corrective Action

No later than February 28, 2011, the Suwannee County School District must reconvene, and provide documentation of the correction, the IEP teams for the two students noted above and correct the identified noncompliance or, with the agreement of the parent and the district, the IEP may be amended without a meeting. In addition, **no later than March 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 November 18, 2010
- **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 one year from the date of receipt of this report. The CAP **must** include a periodic review of a random sample of five IEPs developed after November 18, 2010. This process is 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 problem solving and response to intervention can be found on the Bureau's response to intervention website at <http://www.florida-rti.org/> and the specific learning disabilities (SLD) resource page at <http://www.fl DOE.org/ese/sld.asp>.

Bureau Contacts

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

ESE Program Administration and Quality Assurance (850) 245-0476

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

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| Bureau | Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services |
| BIP | Behavioral intervention plan |
| CAP | Corrective action plan |
| CFR | Code of Federal Regulations |
| ESE | Exceptional student education |
| FBA | Functional behavioral assessment |
| FDOE | Florida Department of Education |
| F.S. | Florida Statutes |
| IDEA | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act |
| IEP | Individual educational plan |
| PS/RtI | Problem solving/response to intervention |
| SLD | Specific learning disabilities |
| SPP | State Performance Plan |



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

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