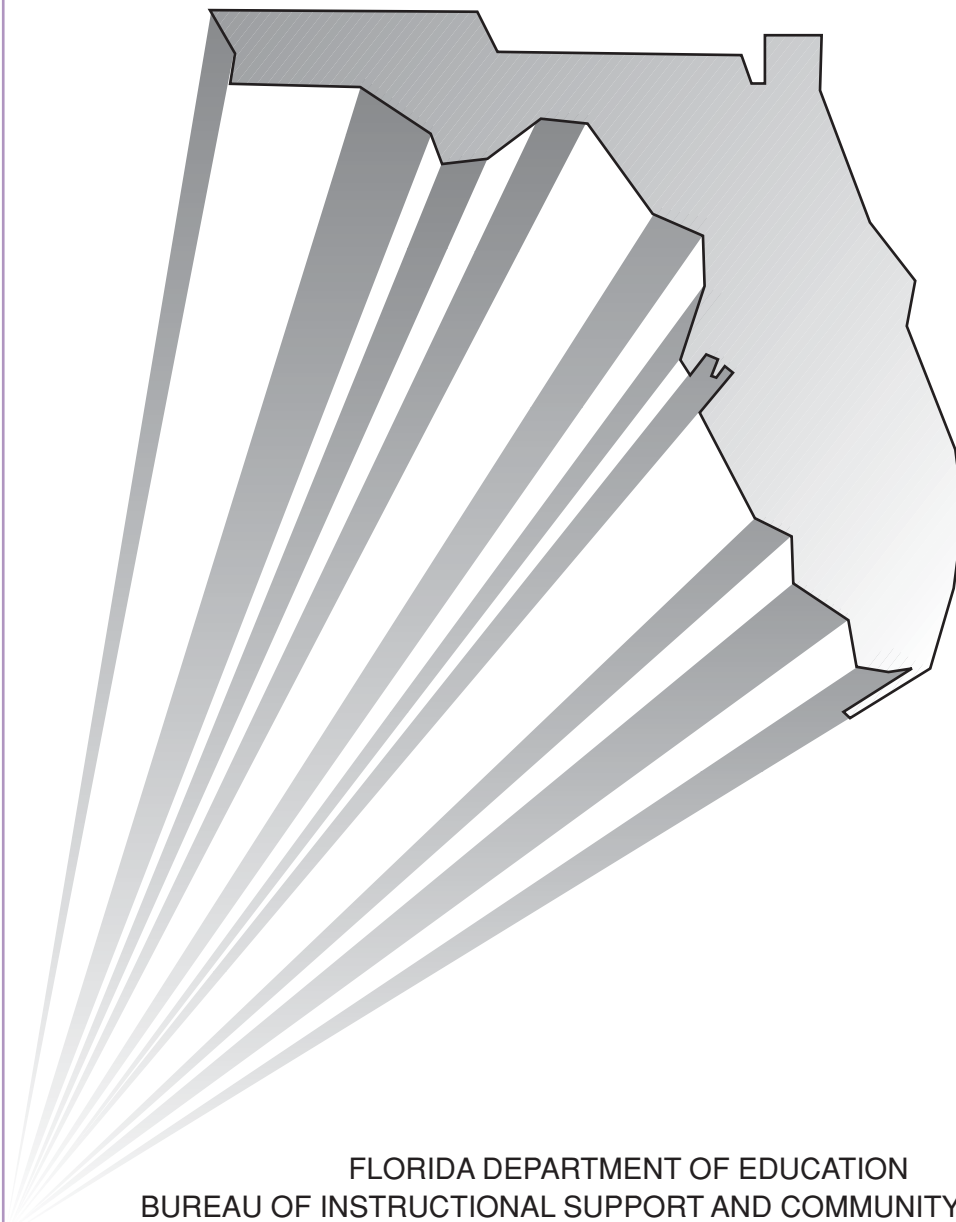


FINAL REPORT OF FOLLOW-UP MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

TAYLOR COUNTY

OCTOBER 8 - 9, 2003



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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December 12, 2003

Ms. Shona Murphy, Coordinator
Exceptional Student Education
Taylor County School District
318 North Clark Street
Perry, Florida 32347

Dear Ms. Murphy:

Thank you for your hospitality and professionalism during our recent follow-up monitoring visit, October 8-9, 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 of non-compliance related to the following topic addressed in the report:

- general supervision (IEP compliance)

Strategies and outcome measures that address this area 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michele Polland".

Michele Polland, Acting Chief
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services

cc: Oscar Howard, Jr.
Kim Komisar

MICHELE POLLAND
Acting Chief
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services

**Taylor County Final Monitoring Report
Verification Monitoring Visit
October 8-9, 2003**

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Taylor County School District Verification Monitoring Visit October 8-9, 2003

On October 8-9, 2003, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, conducted an on-site verification review of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs in Taylor County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting verification 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.

Taylor County was selected for monitoring in 2001 on the basis of the percentage of students with disabilities in regular class placement. 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 April 16-19, 2001:

- least restrictive environment
- general supervision
- parent participation
- 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 verification monitoring visit was a demonstration by the district of the strategies implemented thus far through the system improvement plan developed as a 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 Taylor County district staff included presentations related to the implementation of strategies identified in the system improvement plan based on categories from the final monitoring report. Shona Murphy, Coordinator, Exceptional Student Education, served as the facilitator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. In addition, the following district staff participated in the presentation: Betsy Stevens, Diane Whitfield, Rhonda Brooks, Cheryl Brantley and Romona Patrick. 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 verification visit included visits to Taylor County Elementary School and Taylor County Middle 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. The monitoring visit included the following:

- four interviews with selected school staff
- one classroom observation
- reviews of 4 EPs for students identified as gifted
- reviews of 11 IEPs for students with disabilities

Results

Least Restrictive Environment

According to the 2001 local education agency (LEA) profile 37% of students with disabilities in Taylor County were served in regular class placement (80% or more of the day with nondisabled peers) during the 2000-01 school year. In the 2003 LEA profile, representing data from the 2002-03 school year, 52% of students with disabilities were reported as being served in regular class placement. This is 4% higher than the state average of 48%, and reflects a 15% increase over the two year period. This represents a positive improvement in the regular class placement for students with disabilities. In addition, improvement also has been shown through a decrease in the separate class placement rate for EMH students. During the 2000-01 school year, 76% of the students identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) were reported as being served in separate class placement (less than 40% of the day with nondisabled peers) as opposed to 50% of EMH students during the 2002-03 school year. This is below the state average of 61% and represents a 26% decrease in EMH students being served in separate class placement. This is to be commended.

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

- staff development related to legal issues in ESE
- Florida Diagnostic Learning Resources System (FDLRS) Associate Center and Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU) collaborated on an IEP instructional video
- staff development on sensitivity training
- staff development in reading initiatives (i.e. Anita Archer's Reading Rewards, Project Go and Read 180)
- staff development for Florida Inclusion Program Specialist (FLIPS)
- staff development in secondary transition (Project Connect)
- staff development related to assistive technology
- staff development on the new Goal View computerized IEP system
- training in the area of behavior including CHAMPS (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation) which is a proactive and positive approach to classroom management and the Tough to Teach program
- training and ongoing partnership with the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD Center)

Interviews with school-level staff indicated students are placed in classes according to their IEPs and the IEP team recommends the least restrictive environment to address the student's need. School staff indicated the Tough to Teach program was particularly beneficial in teaching language skills to elementary school children. In addition, ESE students are fully integrated into Read 180 classrooms for remedial reading instruction.

A five part ESE legal issues training was held at multiple sites to inform teachers and staff of highlights of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments and final regulations. These workshops were well attended and generated question and answer sessions. Another initiative that was undertaken to improve compliance and understanding in the IEP process was the collaboration between FDLRS and FAMU on the development of a video. This video was made available for parents to check out or be shown at the IEP meeting to explain the IEP process. This video included information about parental rights and responsibilities. It was reported to be widely used by parents of the ESE pre-kindergarten students, and less widely used by parents of older students.

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 staffing specialists related to compliant IEPs
- random IEP compliance reviews by district staff
- adoption of and training in the new Goal View computerized IEP system

A random review by Bureau staff of 11 IEPs from three schools revealed continued concerns in the following areas:

- present level statements where not descriptive of individual student performance
- annual goals where not measurable
- misuse of change of FAPE
- % of time with nondisabled and class placement did not correlate
- regular class teacher signed as "other;" appearance of no regular class teacher participation
- no frequency or location of accommodations and/or modification
- notification statements on progress reports were omitted on the IEP
- person responsible or completion date not indicated on transition plan

Detailed feedback on specific IEPs reviewed by the Bureau and technical assistance regarding compliance issues were provided during and immediately after the monitoring visit. Additional information regarding these findings, including identification of the specific student records that required reconvening of the IEP teams, has been provided to the district under separate cover. The district will be required to address the issues related to compliance 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 concerns of parents not consistently documented on the IEP, and there was no

documentation on the IEP that parents had received procedural safeguards. Strategies implemented by the district to address these areas include the following:

- implementation of the Goal View IEP system which includes parental concerns
- a copy of the procedural safeguards document attached to the IEP team notice and “procedural safeguards enclosed” written on parent notice of meeting
- for parents who attend the IEP team meeting, a form on which they acknowledge receipt of the procedural safeguards notice
- random reviews of IEPs
- Passport training

Documentation by the district included an explanation of the parent advisory committee and Passport training. Passport training involves eight interactive modules to inform parents about different areas of their child’s education. A parent has started a support group for parents of students with disabilities in Taylor County.

Record reviews verified the documentation of parent concerns in the development of IEPs. The district has fulfilled all requirements of this category and should be commended in its continued efforts to increase parent participation.

Gifted Services

The finding of noncompliance related to gifted services in the 2001 monitoring visit involved the present level of performance statements not being detailed sufficiently. Of the four EP’s reviewed in the verification visit all four had adequate present level statements. In addition the district has:

- expanded the K-5 gifted teacher position to full time
- hired a part time middle school gifted teacher
- hired a part time high school gifted teacher
- provided training on differentiated instruction
- worked with Stanford University to set up a virtual online classroom
- provided a place on the EP form for parent input

The district should be commended for its efforts in this area and is encouraged to continue them.

Child Find

There were no findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of child find.

Transition from Part C to Part B Programs

A finding from the 2001 monitoring report related to the transition of young children from Part C programs to the Part B pre-kindergarten programs reflected a lack of LEA participation in the transition planning process. Currently Taylor County has an interagency agreement with Children’s Home Society’s Early Intervention Program. The district has a child find specialist, who attends all part C to B transition meetings serving as the LEA. A review of selected records verified LEA participation in Part C to B transition meetings. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

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. Course of study statements were documented on the transition IEPs reviewed. The district also participated in Project Connect, a statewide grant where parents, educators, students and outside agencies learn about transition. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Access to the General Curriculum

There were no findings in the 2001 monitoring report.

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. Interviews and record reviews indicated that the speech and language needs of students are being met. Classroom teachers address students' language needs if students have not met eligibility criteria for a language disability.

It appears that referrals to outside agencies for counseling services are routinely provided to students with disabilities who are in need of such services through a counseling service agreement with Florida State University. Counseling was documented on the IEPs reviewed and it was verified by several interviewees that both group counseling and individual counseling are available. In addition, social workers and school counselors routinely provide group and individual counseling, which also is reflected on IEPs.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services conducted a verification monitoring visit to Taylor County District Schools on October 8-9, 2003. The visit served to verify that the district had met all requirements of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in April 2001, with the exception of general supervision. Through presentations and on-site visits, the district demonstrated improvement in all areas. All requirements have been met in the following categories:

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

Continued attention to general supervision related to compliance with all components of the IEP process will need to be addressed in the district's continuous improvement plan. This area must be added to the status report submitted in December 2003.