

**2013-14 Exceptional Student Education  
Monitoring and Assistance  
On-Site Visit Report**

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**Nassau County School District  
December 3-5, 2013**



This publication is produced through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), Division of Public Schools, Florida Department of Education, and is available online at <http://www.fldoe.org/ease/mon-home.asp>. For information on available resources, contact the BEESS Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

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November 17, 2014

Dr. John L. Ruis, Superintendent  
Nassau County School District  
1201 Atlantic Avenue  
Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034

Dear Superintendent Ruis:

We are pleased to provide you with the **2013-14 Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Report for Nassau County School District**. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site monitoring visit to your school district on December 3-5, 2013. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, student-focus groups, student record reviews, **Local Educational Agency Profiles, Guiding Questions – District-Level Needs Assessment** and an action-planning and problem-solving process. This report will be posted on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services' (BEESS) website and may be accessed at <http://www.fldoe.org/ease/mon-home.asp>.

The 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process focuses on those State Performance Plan indicators that contributed to the targeting of school districts for coordinated early intervening services and those indicators that affect equity and access in the educational environment for students with disabilities. Additionally, the process focuses on a shift from ESE compliance to outcomes to prepare all students for college and career readiness, which include: increasing standard diploma graduates; decreasing the number of students dropping out of school; increasing regular class placement; decreasing the need for seclusion and restraint; and eliminating disproportionality in eligibility identification and discipline.

The Nassau County School District was selected for an on-site visit due to least restrictive environment (LRE), coordinating early intervening services (CEIS) and disproportionality. The on-site visit was conducted by a state support team (SST) that included BEESS and discretionary project staff.

**Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief**  
**Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

Superintendent Ruis  
November 17, 2014  
Page Two

Ms. Pauline Gregory, director, Exceptional Student Education, and her staff were very helpful to the SST in preparing for the on-site visit and throughout the visit. In addition, the principals and other staff members at the schools visited welcomed the SST and demonstrated a commitment to the education of students in the school district.

As part of the SST's visit, representatives from the school district's ESE department, the schools visited and other school district staff participated in an action-planning and problem-solving process. This group reviewed the school district's data collected prior to and during the on-site visit, and came to consensus on a priority goal related to preparation for college and career readiness. An action plan, developed around that goal, will be implemented by the ESE department with the assistance of designated discretionary project staff from the SST.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services to exceptional education students in the Nassau County School District. If there are any questions regarding this report, please contact me at 850-245-0475 or via email at [monica.verra-tirado@fldoe.org](mailto:monica.verra-tirado@fldoe.org).

Sincerely,

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Enclosure

cc: Pauline Gregory  
Cathy Bishop  
Patricia Howell  
Liz Conn  
David Wheeler

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**Nassau County School District**

**December 3-5, 2013**

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

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Monitoring and Assistance  
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**December 3–5, 2013  
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**2013-14 Exceptional Student Education  
Monitoring and Assistance  
On-Site Visit Report**

**Nassau County School District**

**December 3–5, 2013**

**Authority**

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), 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 exceptional student education (ESE) laws and rules (sections 1001.03(3), 1003.571 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 (s. 300.1(d) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]). The bureau is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of IDEA 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 ss. 1001.42, 1003.57 and 1003.573, F.S. Through these monitoring activities, the bureau examines records and ESE services, evaluates procedures, provides information and assistance to school districts and otherwise assists school districts in operating effectively and efficiently. The monitoring system is designed to facilitate improved educational outcomes for students while ensuring compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations and state statutes and rules.

Under 34 CFR §300.646(b)(2), if a state identifies significant disproportionality based on race or ethnicity in a local educational agency (LEA) with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities, the identification of children in specific disability categories, the placement of children with disabilities in particular educational settings or the taking of disciplinary actions, the LEA must use the maximum amount (15 percent) of funds allowable for comprehensive coordinated early intervening services (CEIS) for children in the LEA, particularly, but not exclusively, for children in those groups that were significantly overidentified.

Section 1003.573, F.S., Use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities, was created in July 2010, and established documentation, reporting and monitoring requirements for districts regarding the use of restraint and seclusion for students with disabilities. School districts were required to have policies and procedures that govern parent notification, incident reporting, data collection and monitoring of the use of restraint or seclusion for students with disabilities in place no later than January 31, 2011. In July 2011, s. 1003.573, F.S., was amended to require that the FDOE establish standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual or physical restraint and occurrences of seclusion. In September and October 2011, the standards established by the FDOE were provided to school districts and were included in the district's **Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures (SP&P)** document.

## ESE Monitoring and Assistance Process

### Background Information

The 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process focuses on those State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators that contributed to the targeting of school districts for CEIS and the following indicators that affect equity and access in the educational environment for students with disabilities.

- Indicator 1 – Graduation: Percentage of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma.
- Indicator 2 – Dropout: Percentage of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.
- Indicator 4 – Rates of suspension and expulsion:
  - A. Percentage of districts that have a significant discrepancy in the rates of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs.
  - B. Percentage of districts that have (a) a significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days for children with IEPs; and (b) policies, procedures or practices that contribute to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and support and procedural safeguards.
- Indicator 5 – Educational environments:  
Percentage of children with IEPs ages 6 through 21:
  - A. Inside the regular class 80 percent or more of the day;
  - B. Inside the regular class less than 40 percent of the day; and
  - C. In separate schools, residential facilities or homebound or hospital placements.
- Indicator 10 – Disproportionality, specific disability categories: Percentage of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification.
- CEIS – Services provided to students in kindergarten through grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in kindergarten through grade three) who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment.
- Restraint – Rate of incidents of restraint, as reported in the FDOE website.
- Seclusion – Rate of incidents of seclusion, as reported in the FDOE website.

The 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process includes four phases:

- Phase 1 was composed of planning activities that occurred in advance of the first on-site visit to the school district.
- Phase 2 was the initial on-site visit to the selected school district by the state support team (SST).
- Phase 3 includes follow-up and post-initial visit activities that are conducted by a designated follow-up team, as determined by the SST, and identification of the ongoing data that will be collected.
- Phase 4 includes evaluation of the effectiveness of the school district's action plan, and should include participation of the comprehensive team that was involved in Phase 1.

For ESE compliance monitoring purposes, the bureau required all school districts to participate in the 2013-14 Level I Fall Cycle Self-Assessment process, which included the review of records for implementation of IEPs and a review of incidents of restraint and seclusion. School districts



identified as part of the monitoring and assistance process with on-site visits during the 2013-14 school year were exempt from self-assessing school records for IEP implementation and restraint and seclusion. Instead, bureau members of the school district's SST reviewed a sample of records as part of the on-site visit.

In a letter dated August 27, 2013, the superintendent of the Nassau County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: early intervening services, least restrictive environment (LRE) and disproportionate identification of students with disabilities.

### **School Selection**

Upon review of the school district's data reported via the FDOE's web-based reporting systems for CEIS and SPP indicators, and additional data provided by the school district, it was determined that the monitoring and assistance process would involve the following schools and programs for record reviews, school-level administrator interviews or on-site visits:

- Fernandina Beach High School
- Yulee High School
- Hilliard Elementary School

### **On-Site Activities**

#### **SST – On-Site Visit Team**

The following SST members conducted the monitoring and assistance on-site visit:

#### **FDOE, BEESS**

- David Wheeler, school psychology consultant (co-facilitator)
- Liz Conn, program director, (co-facilitator)
- Jayna Jenkins, multi-tiered system of supports and response to intervention (MTSS/RtI) consultant, Student Support Services

#### **FDOE/Bureau Discretionary Projects**

- Therese Sandomierski, technical assistant specialist, Florida's Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Project (action-planning and problem-solving facilitator)
- Victoria McKenzie, regional specialist, differentiated accountability MTSS specialist (co-facilitator for action planning and problem solving)
- Beth Scanlan, regional facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)/West Region
- Gail Brown, project manager, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System

### **Data Collection**

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Classroom observations/instructional visits – 13 classrooms
- District administrator interviews – six
- School administrator interviews – 10
- Teacher interviews – eight participants
- Evaluation focus group – 15 participants
- Student focus groups – two schools (15 Participants)
- MTSS team observation – two participants

## **Review of Records**

The school district was asked to provide the following documents, as applicable, for each of the seven students selected for review of ESE eligibility or IEP implementation:

- Standardized individual test of intellectual functioning
- Standardized assessment of adaptive behavior
- Standardized test of academic or pre-academic achievement
- A social development history compiled directly from the parent, guardian or primary caregiver
- IEPs for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years
- Student's current schedule
- Verification of the provision of specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aids and services, and accommodations or modifications (lesson plans, teacher schedules and therapy logs)
- Verification of the implementation of strategies to work toward mastery of the annual goals as specified on the IEP (lesson plans, therapy logs, interviews)
- Verification of the provision of supports for school personnel as specified on the IEP (lesson plans, consultation logs, interviews)
- Verification that the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals was measured, and the report of progress was provided as often as stated on the IEP

## **Guiding Questions – District-Level Needs Assessment**

Prior to the on-site visit, the school district was provided with questions to use as a guide in the collection of data. SST and district staff reviewed these data during the action-planning and problem-solving process. Nassau County School District's questions were related to LRE and disproportionality. A list of these questions is located in Appendix A of this report.

## **Best Practices in Inclusive Education (BPIE)**

Prior to the on-site visit, the school district participated in the BPIE. Subsequently, the district chose to focus on the following areas that were considered partially implemented:

- Transitioning students with disabilities to maintain placement in the LRE
- Providing students with disabilities most, if not all, of their education and related services in age- and grade-appropriate general education classes, regardless of the type or severity of their disability
- Providing district and school leaders with information and professional development related to BPIE for all students with disabilities
- Providing job-embedded, collaborative professional development and technical assistance to all schools in order to integrate IEP goals and objectives and general education standards in general education classes and natural contexts
- Providing ongoing professional development and technical assistance to all school leaders on the implementation of a flexible scheduling process and collaborative teaching service delivery models to provide instruction and support to all students with disabilities in the general education setting
- Providing professional development and technical assistance to schools in the use of a variety of tools to gather and analyze data and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional and behavioral interventions for all students with disabilities in general education and natural contexts

## Results

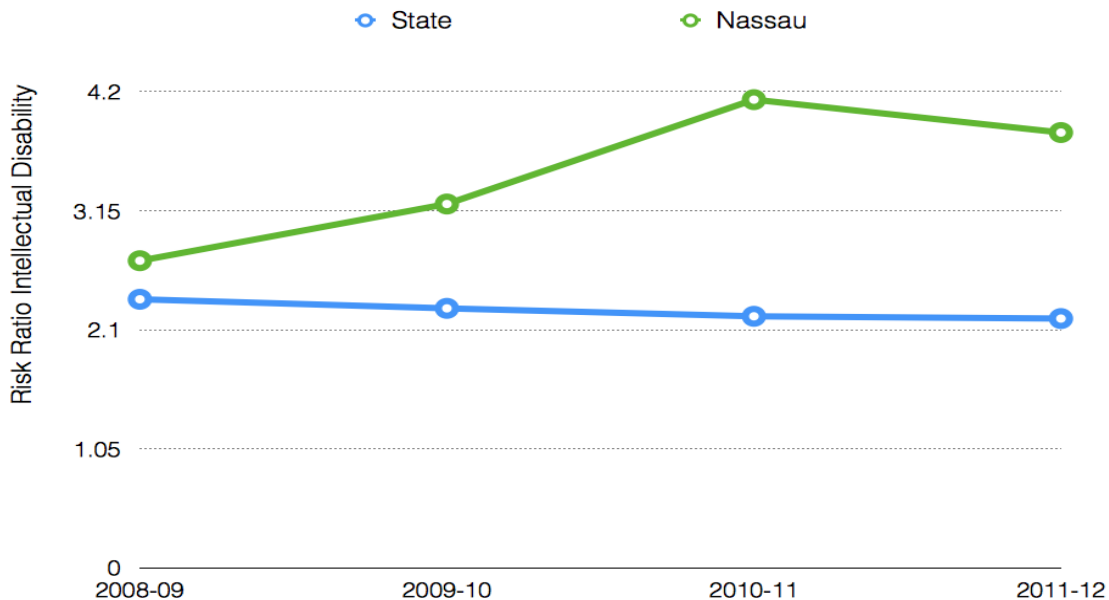
The following results reflect the data collected and reviewed through the activities of the 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process for Nassau County School District. Also included are commendations, findings of noncompliance and next steps, as applicable.

Size-alike comparisons are made with data from the following districts (enrollment group) classified as small to medium: Citrus, Charlotte, Columbia, Flagler, Highlands, Indian River, Jackson, Martin, Monroe, Putnam, Sumter and Walton.

### Data Review

#### Disproportionality

Risk ratios are used to identify the magnitude of disproportionality. Since the 2008-09 school year, Nassau's risk ratio for the identification of Black students with an Intellectual Disability has been higher than the state risk ratio, and has rapidly increased over the same period while the state risk ratio has been gradually decreasing (see Chart below - October Survey 2 Data).

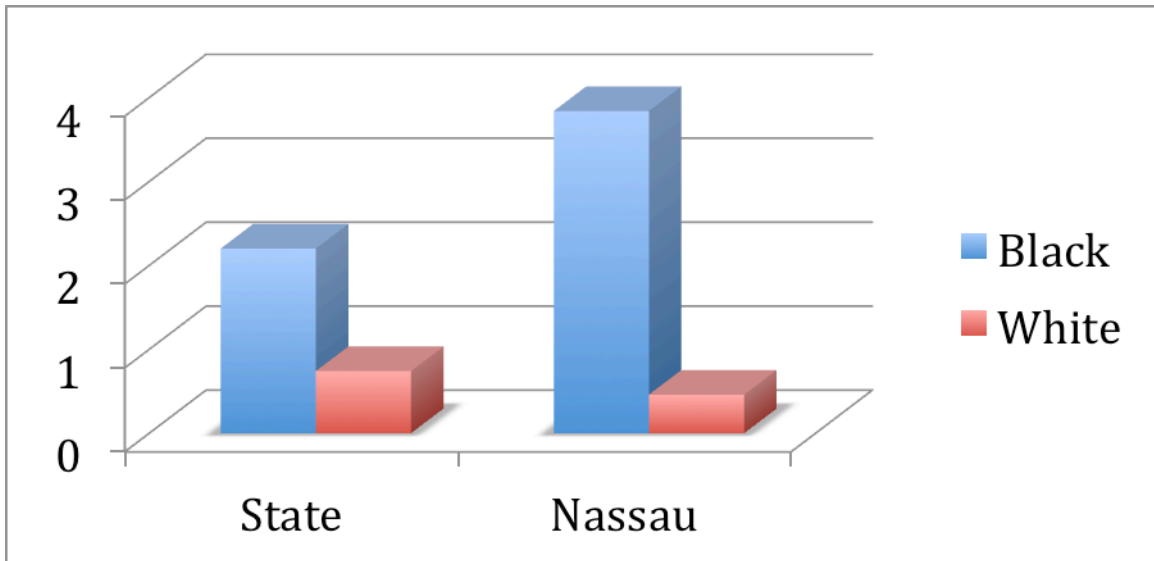


In 2012, Nassau's risk ratio for Intellectual Disability was significantly higher than the state risk ratio for Black students and lower than the state risk ratio for White students. The following chart and graph on the next page illustrate Risk Ratios for Black and White students Identified as Intellectually Disabled in Florida and in Nassau County Schools.

	White	Black
State	0.74	2.20
Nassau	0.46	3.84

Source: LEA Profile 2013

The following graph illustrates the discrepancy in risk ratios between Blacks and Whites identified with an Intellectual Disability in Florida and Nassau County as well as the discrepancy between Nassau's risk ratio for Blacks (the blue bars) compared to the state risk ratio.



Source: Fall 2012 and October Survey 2 Data Files

#### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

LRE				
Regular Class	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Nassau	67%	66%	60%	59%
Enrollment Group	66%	67%	68%	67%
State	69%	69%	71%	71%

Resource Room	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Nassau	11%	13%	18%	20%
Enrollment Group	15%	13%	14%	15%
State	12%	12%	11%	10%

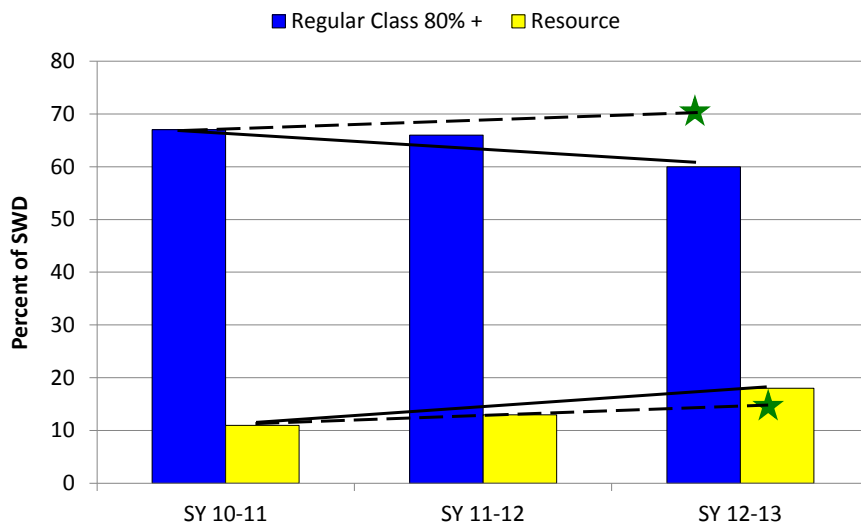
Separate Class	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Nassau	22%	22%	22%	21%
Enrollment Group	15%	16%	15%	15%
State	15%	15%	14%	15%

Other Separate Environment	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Nassau	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Enrollment Group	4%	4%	3%	3%
State	4%	4%	4%	4%

Source: LEA Profiles 2013 and 2014

As depicted on the Chart on the previous page, Nassau has placed a smaller percentage of students with disabilities in the regular classroom than other size-alike districts or the state as a whole. As illustrated in the following graph, the percentage of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment has decreased rather than increased over time (blue bars depict percentage of students with disabilities (SWD) in regular education).

## Regular and resource class placement over time



Source: LEA Profile 2013

In addition to the data above, the school district reported the following during interviews, review of the guiding questions and the action-planning and problem-solving process:

- Disproportionate Identification.
  - Nassau’s current risk ratio for black students identified as InD was 3.84, compared to the state average of 2.2.
  - The district team felt district staff would benefit from additional instruction on cultural and economic differences, so that they would be better prepared to initiate discussions with school staff about disproportionality. The district would need to make the connection between cultural and economic differences in general, and how those differences relate to the problem of disproportionality in special education. Ultimately, the goal would be to address the belief that disproportionate identification is not an issue or a concern.
  - Seventy-eight percent of the black students identified as students with InD were identified before second grade. Two out of 23 (9 percent) had nonverbal IQs above 80. There is uncertainty as to the validity of the current tests that are used to evaluate this student population.

- The district team discussed how prekindergarten effectiveness and best practices varied throughout the district, and noted that a high percentage of students with InD are identified before second grade. The team’s hypothesis that disproportionate identification may start with prekindergarten instruction led the district team to recognize a need to assess and enhance current prekindergarten practices and classrooms throughout the district.
- General Education Environment
  - The transition between prekindergarten instruction and kindergarten offers the opportunity to improve student supports, including developing transition plans, without requiring the determination of students’ eligibility for ESE services. Prekindergarten teachers are being asked to become familiar with kindergarten standards and revise instructional practice in order to prepare students for the general education kindergarten classrooms (e.g., introducing beginning kindergarten skills at the end of the prekindergarten year). They are also moving in the direction of the prekindergarten teachers being on the kindergarten team.
  - As a result of looking at the data, one conversation the district is having is the possibility of integrating push-in services for community-based preschool students with mild disabilities. They are currently reviewing how other districts have done this.
  - Elementary school improvement plans include small group reading (vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) and math. The goal is to teach students at their level.
    - Teachers meet every week and plan for the next week.
    - Science is being brought into reading in small groups to support reading comprehension. Poetry is being used to address fluency.
    - A basal story is read once a week.
    - The general education curriculum is being taught with additional supports in the self-contained classrooms.
  - Three schools met their annual measurable objective targets for students with disabilities in math. It would be helpful to share their strategies with other schools in the district. Some of these included a small group program for elementary school and the review, preview, and teach model.
  - Right now the Learning Strategies class is only offered to students with disabilities; the service delivery model places students in the resource room category even when all of the students’ other classes take place in the general education environment. It may be possible to list the Learning Strategies course under both ESE and general education.
    - There are general education students who need the skills covered in this class. They would benefit from enrolling in this course, which would result in providing more time for students with disabilities to be with their nondisabled peers.
    - The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program can be used in conjunction with the Learning Strategies course. (It is similar but offered only to students who meet certain criteria.)
  - Graduation rate increased and dropout rate decreased when the district moved toward more inclusion. This year’s initiative is that every classroom will have small-group instruction. They are already seeing benefits to students.
  - More personnel are needed to serve students in more inclusive settings. Lack of personnel is a barrier to inclusion.
  - General education teachers provide instruction in self-contained classes to teach core subjects (e.g., math).
  - Schools have a different amount of total time in their school day, so the calculation for the percentage of time spent in general education is different for each school. The

district is seeking clarification on whether the calculation should be based on bell-to-bell minutes for each school day, or total instructional time for each school day.

- Data
  - FOCUS (the student information system) graphs some student data, and provides information about students' accommodations.
  - There is a need to improve the data systems that allow the district to monitor students' time spent in restrictive settings. For example, the bell-to-bell summary sheet for prekindergarten students is based on a four-day school week, but prekindergarten students are with nondisabled peers on their fifth day (20 percent of the time). Therefore, current reports underestimate the degree to which young students are educated with their nondisabled peers.
  - District initiatives are aimed at strengthening core instruction. Core instruction is being emphasized by the MTSS teams. This year the district is using the Florida Assessments For Instruction in Reading (FAIR) and the Renaissance Learning STAR reading and STAR math as screening and progress monitoring tools.
- Professional Development
  - Teachers are participating in professional development. However, it would benefit general education teachers to have more professional development related to increasing knowledge of ESE.

### **Classroom Observations and Instructional Visits**

**Hilliard Elementary School:** MTSS meeting observation and classroom walk-throughs. The team observed an individual student problem-solving meeting led by the school counselor. Team members included the principal, current and previous teacher, parent and district staff. The team shared data about the student's progress and response to interventions, and made decisions concerning next steps regarding instruction, based on the data.

The team visited several general education inclusion classes across grade levels and instructional content areas. The district had asked the team to notice the teacher-directed small-group instruction and coordinated, independent, center-based activities that have successfully integrated students with disabilities into the regular classroom and increased academic outcomes for all students. In all classrooms, students were actively engaged, either in a small-group, teacher-table instruction or in independent or cooperative group activities. The team noted a high level of active engagement, self-directed learning and use of manipulatives when students were not participating in teacher-directed small group instruction.

### **Student Focus Groups**

Student focus groups were conducted at two high schools during the monitoring and assistance on-site visit. Student views were collected on the following topics: IEP team meetings and parental participation, career and technical education, academics, extracurricular activities, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT) 2.0, diploma options, and resources and services the students would like to see. Fifteen students with disabilities volunteered to participate in the focus groups.

Most students found that IEP team meetings were helpful. Most indicated that they have participated in the IEP process. Students who were 17 or older indicated that they did not know that, after the age of 18, their rights were to be transferred to them. Two of the fifteen students were taking the Florida Alternative Assessment this year. Twelve students were working toward

a standard diploma. All but one had clear post-high school goals that included attending college or technical school. All 15 students were enrolled in a Learning Strategies class. One group of students was from the same class. They felt supported by the teacher and said that the teacher helped them role play how they were going to communicate their needs to general education teachers. Other than the resource class, these students were in general education classes. Two students spoke about using their accommodations. One student indicated having done all the required work, but test scores were failing grades. Teachers had not helped the student problem solve around this. Students reported they were treated the same as their general education peers, and had the same opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities as all students. In reference to the FCAT, students indicated they felt better prepared for the reading and writing portions of the FCAT. Some of the math problems on the test were over their heads. Students from one of the schools did not know about the FCAT waiver. Students indicated that there were programs that assisted students in getting jobs. However, the four students who had jobs reported they had gotten their jobs independently of the school program. Though most students felt that school was preparing them for college, one group of students indicated that the school could improve on reaching out to students with disabilities and sharing more information on how to go to college and get additional supports.

### **Evaluation Focus Group**

Fifteen district-level staff, including school psychologists, staffing specialists, a school social worker and a behavior specialist, participated in a focus group to identify policies and practices contributing to disproportionality. The group did not identify any district policies or practices that they believed were contributing to disproportionality, and some questioned whether the disproportionate identification of black students as students with InD or EBD, and the placement of students with disabilities in more restrictive settings in Nassau is inappropriate. Reducing disproportionality in InD and LRE was perceived as a push to bring down numbers but not as necessarily benefitting students. There was some consensus that the overrepresentation of black students in InD and EBD placements, and placement in more restrictive settings, is due to student performance and poverty rather than race, instructional support or evaluation practices. There was a shared belief that schools and evaluators are doing what is best. As one participant stated, "We know the students, we have relationships with the child and care about the child, and we make decisions that are best for the child." Respondents indicated that eligibility and LRE placement decisions are sometimes driven by the model of services available and the capacity of schools to integrate students with significant cognitive disabilities in regular education classrooms.

When asked how evaluators ensure that the assessment instruments and interpretation are not discriminatory, focus group participants indicated that they consider instruments that are less language dominant or look at the nonverbal composites; rely on the expertise of the team and not just the IQ score; use multiple measures and sources of data, including the parent; consider subtest performance; look at other factors affecting performance (e.g., if family is highly mobile and that may have affected performance, the child may be identified as a student with InD). For students already identified, student classroom performance, progress-monitoring data and reevaluations are used to validate placement and label.

Staff made the following recommendations to reduce overrepresentation of black students:

- Broaden the window for the developmental delay decision until later so that students with limited cognitive ability could continue to receive ESE services without being identified as students with InD.



- Provide more support services in general education so students don't need to be identified to get support services.
- Lower the teacher-pupil ratio.
- Reduce class size.
- Identify and train on factors that affect disproportionality to assist teams in avoiding them.
- Address the impact of lower functioning students on teacher evaluations.

### **Commendations**

- Graduation rate increased and dropout rate decreased when the district moved toward more inclusion. This year's initiative is that every classroom will have small-group instruction. They are already seeing benefits to students and the MTSS process. District leadership is collaborating with Exceptional Education to address policies and practices that are barriers for highest achievement for students with disabilities.
- The 2014 LEA data indicated that disproportionality has been significantly reduced.
- District initiatives are aimed at strengthening core instruction. Core instruction is being emphasized by the MTSS teams.
- District technology personnel participated in the discussion, particularly regarding the need to identify needed data and to modify the data system in order to provide the data needed, and to ensure that there was access to the data.

### **ESE Monitoring and Compliance**

#### **Records Review**

Bureau staff reviewed records of seven students in the school district, from a sampling of five schools. Standards from the IEP Implementation and Initial Evaluation protocols were reviewed. No findings of noncompliance were noted in these records.

#### **Action-Planning and Problem-Solving Process and Next Steps**

As part of the monitoring and assistance on-site visit, the SST members, ESE director and representatives from the Nassau County School District participated in an action-planning and problem-solving process. The group reviewed the data collected prior to and during the on-site visit, and developed a list of priorities and obstacles. With regard to disproportionality (Indicator 10), the district team identified priorities around validating black students' current diagnosis of InD, enhancing instructional differentiation and support in the district's prekindergarten programs so students may be less likely to be identified, and improving cultural awareness among district staff. With regard to LRE (Indicator 5), the district team identified priorities to improve the data systems that monitor the amount of time students with disabilities spend in resource and self-contained environments, to expand classes currently offered to students with disabilities to nondisabled students and to improve teachers' fluency with data-based instructional planning. Action plans were developed to address each of these priorities. The following goals and action steps were identified by the district team.

#### **Indicator 10**

**Desired outcome and how it will be measured:** To reduce the risk ratio for black students so they have an equal risk as all other students for being identified as InD. Short-term goal: meet the state target. Nassau will measure progress with the risk ratio.

**Goal and Measurement: Ensure initial evaluation results are valid for black students currently identified as students with InD. Progress toward completion of this goal will be measured through permanent products (see below).**

**Discussion:** Seventy-eight percent of black students were identified as students with InD before second grade. Two out of 23 (9 percent) had nonverbal IQs above 80. There is uncertainty as to the validity of the current tests used to evaluate this student population.

- Identify age of current InD students at initial evaluation. Students may have been identified prior to age eight. IQ test results for students who are less than eight years old are less stable than results of tests for older students.
- Flag all black students with non-verbal IQ scores greater than 67, who were identified as students with InD, and reevaluate.
- Confirm whether groups used to norm the tests that were used to identify students as InD were representative for black students.
- Identify validity of current tests used in identification.
- Identify the total number of black students that would be needed for this group to have an equal risk of being identified as InD as all other students in Nassau County.
- Review recent trends in identification of black students as InD to determine the extent to which current practices contribute to disproportionate representation.
- Examine prekindergarten students' preparation levels (for students who have three years of prekindergarten) by teacher and school.

**Goal and Measurement: To enhance prekindergarten programs and supports so that children enter kindergarten with a higher skill level. Process for measuring progress to this goal has not been established.**

**Discussion:** There is a focus on identifying students who are not ready for Kindergarten.

- Develop a prekindergarten academy for Fridays. The academy will include a focus on building communication skills (Total Communication), and may also address characteristics of students from low socio-economic backgrounds as described by Ruby Payne.
- The reading program Language for Thinking will be explored for older students.
- The district team will become more familiar with specific skill levels and needs of prekindergarten teachers by completing classroom walk-throughs.
- Elementary school principals will become more familiar with what effective prekindergarten programs look like. Feedback and training will be given to principals so they can provide direction and feedback to prekindergarten teachers.

**Goal and Measurement: District ESE staff will be knowledgeable regarding students from low socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. This will be measured by content shared in discussions with school staff, trainings provided, etc.**

**Discussion:** Staff who will support the district initiative will benefit from additional awareness, examples of race and socioeconomic status differences. **The district will need to make the link between general differences and the need to address disproportionality in ESE.**

- Plan for a Ruby Payne seminar or a book study on socio-economic status and cultural differences for all ESE staff.
- Have the seminar during the 2014-15 school year.

**Desired Outcome and How it will be Measured:** To increase the percentage of students who will receive services primarily in the general education classroom.

**Goal and Measurement: Develop automated process for identifying the number of students served in resource and self-contained units at each school and throughout district. Report will be run every nine weeks to monitor progress toward long-term goal.**

**Discussion:** Schools have different amounts of total time in their school day, so the calculation for the percentage of time spent in general education is different for each school. The district is seeking clarification on whether the calculation should be based on bell-to-bell minutes for each school day, or total instructional time for each school day.

- Clarify the number of students currently receiving services in resource and self-contained classrooms at each school.
- Work with management informational system (MIS) staff to develop an automated query process that will help monitor the amount of time that students with disabilities spend in resource and self-contained classrooms.
- Investigate the possibility of tracking the percentage of time spent in general education for students as a way of monitoring progress toward this goal. This is a more sensitive measure than the simple categorization reported in the LEA profile.
- At the beginning of each school year, a new course information sheet will need to be submitted for each school so the total number of school-day minutes is accurate. Once the number of minutes in a school day has been updated in FOCUS, MIS will check to see if there is a need to update the district queries with the new information.

**Goal and Measurement: Open the Learning Strategies class to general education students – course will be listed as a general education course.**

**Discussion:** Right now this class is only offered to students with disabilities, which could result in students being placed in the resource category. There are general education students who need the skills covered in this class, so they would benefit from enrolling in this course. Opening the course to general education students will result in these minutes being counted in the general education category. The AVID program can be used in conjunction with this course. (It is similar to the resource class, but offered only to students who meet certain criteria). It may be possible to list the Learning Strategies course under both ESE and general education; dual certification is also involved in these changes.

- Discuss strategies for opening this course with key staff.
- Identify general education students who will benefit from this course.

**Goal and Measurement: Develop system for tracking the number of general education minutes for prekindergarten students who are identified as students with disabilities.**

**Discussion:** Bell-to-bell summary sheet for prekindergarten students is based on a four-day school week, but prekindergarten students are with non-disabled peers on their fifth day.

- Obtain a snapshot to see current levels for prekindergarten students. Bell-to-bell schedule needs to be adjusted to reflect prekindergarten students' schedule.

**Goal and Measurement: Instruct teachers on how to obtain reports from the student information system, FOCUS, that will be useful for identifying specific skill deficits, and teach them how to use the information to inform their instruction (school-based training). Teachers will demonstrate how data were used to build their lesson plans.**

- Identify and prioritize relevant data sources.
- Identify a way to quantify or measure the data-culture in our schools (ideas include interviewing staffing specialists, observing team meetings, reviewing grade-level meeting minutes and developing a report depicting log-ins to data systems, etc.).
- District leadership will share Indicator 5 and 10 data with school principals to let them know what's coming, and demonstrate how data are being used to identify priorities across the state and district. SST will share data presented during our meeting.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>Educational environment (LRE)</b>	
Summary:	The placement of students with disabilities in more restrictive educational environments exceeds the district's enrollment group and the state averages.
Recommendation:	The school district should consider ways that the specially designed instruction offered in the resource room for students with disabilities could be supported and implemented in the general education setting. Additionally, it is recommended that the strategies for increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities identified in the BPIE action plan be continued.
Required Action:	None
<b>CEIS and Disproportionate representation</b>	
Summary:	Nassau County School District was required to set aside 15 percent of IDEA, Part B funds for early intervening services because the school district's data indicated the following: The risk ratio for blacks identified as students with InD is 3.84, which exceeds the state risk ratio of 2.20 (according to the 2013 LEA Profile).
Recommendations:	The district should confirm the extent to which current practices and evaluations are contributing to the disproportionate identification of black students as students with InD, and investigate ways in which early instruction and services may help reduce the need for identification.
Required Actions:	None. Based on 2013 data, Nassau is no longer required to appropriate CEIS due to disproportionality.
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process</b>	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional action planning and problem solving in regard to LRE and overrepresentation was scheduled for February 6, 2014.</li> <li>• By <b>January 20, 2015</b>, the SST, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan(s) and determine additional next steps, as appropriate.</li> </ul>

## Technical Assistance

1. **Florida's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** website at <http://www.florida-rti.org/> provides Florida-specific information and resources that promote systemwide practices to ensure highest possible student achievement in both academic and behavioral pursuits. Implementation of an integrated support system informed by data-based problem solving is one of the most effective strategies for improving student outcomes and reducing inappropriate identification for over-represented groups.
2. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems at <http://www.nccrest.org> provides resources to support state education agencies and local school systems to assure a quality, culturally responsive education for all students, including self-assessment tools for school-level and district-level analysis of disproportionality. **Preventing Disproportionality by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures — An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process** is a rubric designed to guide the examination of LEA practices that result in disproportionate identification. **Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self- Assessment Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice** is an instrument that helps schools conduct a self-assessment of their programs and practices in five domains: (a) School Governance, Organization, Policy and Climate, (b) Family Involvement, (c) Curriculum, (d) Organization of Learning, and (e) Special Education Referral Process and Programs.
3. **Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving** at <http://www.florida-rti.org/docs/GTIPS.pdf> is a practical manual to assist school teams engaged in the systematic problem-solving process to improve student outcomes. It includes “imperative questions” that guide data-based problem solving at the universal, supplemental and intensive levels of instruction and support.
4. The **Regional Resource Center Program's Disproportionality Priority Team** resource page at <http://disprop.sites.tadnet.org/pages/49> provides links to federal centers that conduct work to address disproportionality, as well as training modules, resources, tools and templates for use by states, school districts and local schools. The **Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps** document and **Success Gaps Rubric** identify areas that may be causing the success gaps and offers a process for teams to engage in planning and implementing improvement strategies to reduce success gaps.
5. According to s. 1003.57, F.S., once every three years, each school district and school shall complete a Best Practices in Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with a FIN facilitator and include the results of the BPIE assessment and all planned short-term and long-term improvement efforts in the school district's SP&P. BPIE is an internal assessment process designed to facilitate the analysis, implementation and improvement of inclusive educational practices at the district and school team levels.
6. A FIN facilitator is available to assist the school district in scheduling and completing the BPIE, and based on the results, will identify how FIN can provide support to the school district (<http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com>)

7. Ruby K. Payne is an American educator and author best known for her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, and her work on the culture of poverty and its relationship to education. She is the founder of aha! Process, Inc., a company that informs schools, companies and other organizations about poverty. Additional information may be accessed at: <http://www.ahaprocess.com/who-we-are/dr-ruby-payne/>.

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

**2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance**

**State Support Team for Nassau County School District**

**Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

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## Appendix A: Guiding Questions – District-Level Needs Assessment

1. Where is the district currently at (most current data levels on disproportionality and LRE)?
2. What is the gap between BEESS expected level(s) of disproportionality and LRE and your district's current level(s) of disproportionality and LRE?
3. Are there other subgroups that are disproportionately identified as InD?
  - Gender
  - Free and reduced lunch (Economic Status)
  - English Language Learners
4. Are there other subgroups that are disproportionately identified for restrictive placement?
  - Gender
  - Race or ethnic group
  - Free and reduced lunch (Economic Status)
  - English Language Learners
  - Students with Disabilities (by each sub-group)
5. Using disaggregated district indicator data by school, which schools are contributing to total district frequency for disproportionality and LRE?
6. Is there any pattern when these data are disaggregated by school level? What evidence-based practices are currently planned for use or implementation at the school level?
7. How does the District Improvement Plan address disproportionality and LRE?
8. Describe the district's problem-solving efforts to address the current disproportionality and LRE.
9. How does your ESE Policies and Procedures document (SP&P) ensure fidelity of identification of students with InD and the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?
10. What strategies, initiatives, and resources have been identified in the DIAP with regard to achieving AMO targets for students with disabilities? What resources have been identified to address identification of students with InD; specifically, B\black students with InD? LRE?
11. How are school-level evidence-based practices being supported by the district specifically to address disproportionality and LRE for improvement? Are these supports being provided with fidelity, and what is the evidence?
12. What does the district do to monitor the implementation of school-level practices? Are school-level practices in the areas of concern being provided with fidelity? Do they result in increased access to general education and improved academic outcomes for students?



13. Identify the potential barriers specific to disproportionality and LRE at the district level.
14. As applicable, has the mid-year reflection based on mid-year assessment data been completed? If yes, were any adjustments made to the DIAP that would impact improved outcomes for students with disabilities?
15. Provide data to support that the core instruction (Tier 1) is effective for all subgroups.
16. How are the Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) funds (the 15% required by IDEA) used to address disproportionality in InD? Has there been any evidence of improved outcomes as a result of interventions provided through CEIS? Which students or subgroups are benefiting?
17. What percentage of black students identified as InD were found eligible before the second grade? What percentage of all other students with InD were found eligible before the second grade?
18. What percentage of black students with InD have IQs between 65 and 70? What percentage had nonverbal IQs above 80? What percentage of all other students with InD have IQs between 65 and 70? What percentage had nonverbal IQs above 80?
19. How many students with InD transferred into Nassau County during the 2012-13 school year? What is your process for ensuring that they have been appropriately identified? If they are appropriately identified, what are your procedures for determining whether these students' needs can be met in the general education setting?
20. What percentage of parents of black students participated on the IEP team making eligibility determinations? What percentage of all other parents participated on the IEP team making eligibility determinations?
21. What is the process for deciding when a student should be placed in a more restrictive setting?
22. Which disability categories are served primarily in self-contained classrooms?
23. Identify the schools that have cluster sites and the exceptionalities they serve. Of those exceptionalities for which there are cluster sites, how many students with those particular exceptionalities are served in a general education setting?
24. Which BPIE indicators are priorities for your district for the upcoming three years?
25. What is the impact of pre-K inclusion practices on LRE in K-12?

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

**Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

The following is a list of acronyms, abbreviations and terms used within this report.

AVID	Advancement Via Individual Determination
BEESS	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
BPIE	Best Practices for Inclusive Education
CEIS	Coordinated early intervening services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EBD	Emotional or behavioral disability
ESE	Exceptional student education
FAIR	Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading
FAPE	Free and appropriate public education
FCAT 2.0	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test 2.0
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
IND	Intellectual disability
LEA	Local educational agency
LRE	Least restrictive environment
MIS	Management Information Systems
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of supports
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
RtI	Response to Intervention
SP&P	Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures
SPP	State Performance Plan
SST	State Support Team
USF	University of South Florida



Pam Stewart, Commissioner

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