

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

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**St. Johns County School District  
March 25-27, 2014**



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

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October 24, 2014

Dr. Joseph Joyner, Superintendent  
St. Johns County School District  
40 Orange Street  
St. Augustine, Florida 32084

Dear Superintendent Joyner:

We are pleased to provide you with the **2013-14 Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Report for St. Johns 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 March 25-27, 2014. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, 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' (bureau) 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 St. Johns County School District was selected for an on-site visit due to equity and access issues related to rates of incidents of restraint and the rates of suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities. The on-site visit was conducted by a state support team (SST) that included bureau and discretionary project staff.

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

Superintendent Joyner  
October 24, 2014  
Page Two

Ms. Lisa Bell, director of ESE, 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 determined the areas of need to address in the action plan. Based upon the areas of need, the action plan 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 St. Johns 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: Lisa Bell  
George Freeman  
Cathy Bishop  
Patricia Howell  
Vicki Eddy

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**2013-14 Exceptional Student Education  
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On-Site Visit Report**

**St. Johns County School District**

**March 25 - 27, 2014**

## **Authority**

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), 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 aged 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/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 St. Johns County School District was informed that the bureau would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: restraint and discipline for students with disabilities.

### **School Selection**

Upon review of the school district's data reported via the FDOE's web-based reporting system for incidents of restraint and SPP indicator 4B, and additional data provided by the school district, it was determined that the monitoring and assistance process would involve the following schools for record reviews, school-level administrator interviews or on-site visits:

- St. Johns County Transition Program School
- Ketterlinus Elementary School (KES) – visited while on-site
- Webster Elementary School
- R.J. Murray Middle School – visited while on-site
- St. Augustine High School
- Wards Creek Elementary School

### **Pre-visit District-Level Interview**

On February 13, 2014, an interview regarding the on-site visit was conducted via telephone with the following district-level staff members: Ms. Lisa Bell, director of ESE, George Freeman, program specialist for Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (EBD), and Lorna Kirkham, coordinator for Accountability for Intervention Services.

### **On-Site Activities**

#### ***On-Site Visit Team***

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

FDOE, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

- Vicki Eddy, program specialist (facilitator)
- Jill Snelson, program specialist (on-site facilitator)
- Amelia Bowman, program specialist
- Jerry Brown, program specialist

FDOE, Bureau Discretionary Projects

- Therese Sandomierski, Ed.D., technical assistance specialist, Florida's Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Project (action-planning and problem-solving facilitator)
- Jayna Jenkins, Ed.D., Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) liaison, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (action-planning and problem-solving co-facilitator)
- David Childers, MD, chief, Division of Developmental Pediatrics, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD), University of Florida
- Elise Summa, board certified behavior analyst, clinician, CARD

- Amy Lane, program administrator, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) North East Florida Educational Consortium
- Carl Coalson, regional project manager, Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET)
- Elizabeth Scanlan, coordinator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN), East Region

### ***Data Collection***

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- School-level administrator interviews – two participants (assistant principals and school principals participated in the action-planning and problem-solving sessions)
- School program walk-through observations – three classrooms
- Completion of Restraint and Seclusion protocol – four students
- Completion of IEP Implementation protocol – four students
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 17 participants
- Review of data from the school district’s LEA Profiles, Guiding Questions – District Level Needs Assessment and data compiled from district data systems

### ***Review of Records***

The school district was asked to provide the following documents, as applicable, for each of the 8 students selected for review of restraint or IEP implementation:

- IEPs for current and previous school year
- Current functional behavioral assessment
- Current behavioral intervention plan (BIP)
- Discipline and attendance records for 2013-14 school year
- Progress reports and report cards (current and previous year)
- Student’s current schedule
- Parent notifications and other documentation related to incidents of restraint
- Verification of training for staff members involved in incidents of restraint
- Verification of the provision of related services and accommodations (lesson plans, teacher schedules and therapy logs)

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

Prior to the on-site visit, the school district was given questions to use as a guide in the collection of data. SST and district staff (including principals of the schools visited) reviewed the data during the problem-solving and action-planning processes. St. Johns County School District’s questions were related to restraint and SPP indicator 4B. A list of these questions is located in Appendix A of this report.

The district also addressed suspension and expulsion in the services plan within their Best Practices in Inclusive Education (BPIE) Assessment. The BPIE is required once every three years pursuant to s.1003.57, F.S., and is an internal assessment process designed to facilitate the analysis, implementation and improvement of inclusive educational practices. On February 18, 2014, the St. Johns County School District completed the BPIE process and included the following two goals related to suspension and expulsion:

- Decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions by three percent by the end of the 2014-2015 school year by completing the following:
  - Review LEA profile data for risk factor ratios to identify individual school needs

- Review alternatives to suspension
- Review behavior resources for different strategies and outcomes for possible use
- Create a school-based profile similar to the district's LEA profiles
- Based on a review of school-based profiles, each school will receive targeted professional development in order to lower the suspension rates of students with disabilities by the end of the 2014-2015 school year by completing the following:
  - Schools will review their profiles to identify areas of concern within suspension and expulsion trends
  - Schools will prioritize the professional development needs of their schools
  - Schools will create an individual school professional development plan to meet their needs

## **Results**

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

### ***Restraint***

The district's SP&P document reported that in 2004, the district approved Professional Crisis Management (PCM) as a crisis management system to be used within their schools. The SP&P reported that the Professional Crisis Management Association provides training for school staff in crisis management, which includes prevention strategies, crisis de-escalation strategies, crisis intervention strategies and post-crisis or reintegration strategies.

According to the district's SP&P document, restraint is only used in emergency situations where aggressive and/or self-injurious behaviors of a student present an immediate, significant and/or imminent threat to the physical safety of the student and/or others. In addition, restraint is only used for the period of time needed to contain the behavior of concern and eliminate the immediate threat of harm to the student or others.

Due to the district's rates of incidents of restraint of students identified with disabilities when compared to rates in like-sized districts, the district was required to engage in a problem-solving process in order to reduce the use of restraints, particularly in settings in which it occurs frequently or with students who were being restrained repeatedly. During the 2013-14 school year the district's number of restraint incidents was almost five times higher than the average of other size-alike districts. In addition, the number of students being restrained was over 2.25 times higher than other size-alike districts.

**Data Review**

<b>Comparison of Size-Alike Districts for Restraints</b>			
<b>School Year</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Number of Incidents</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>St. Johns</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>119</b>
	Alachua	60	21
	Bay	187	90
	Clay	138	63
	Hernando	19	14
	Leon	162	72
	Okaloosa	103	44
	Santa Rosa	51	23
	St. Lucie	294	125
<b>School Year</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Number of Incidents</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
<b>2013-14</b>	<b>St. Johns</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>116</b>
	Alachua	90	28
	Bay	127	75
	Clay	176	80
	Hernando	*	*
	Leon	160	65
	Okaloosa	73	41
	Santa Rosa	54	21
	St. Lucie	214	89
<i>Source: Florida Department of Education – Restraint Data Reported from Districts</i>			
<i>*Number is less than 10, including zero</i>			

<b>District Student Membership by Race/Ethnicity (October 2013)</b>		
	<b>All Students</b>	<b>Students with Disabilities</b>
White	80%	76%
Black	7%	12%
Hispanic	7%	7%
Asian	*	*
American Indian/Alaskan Native	*	*
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Island	*	*
Two or More Races	*	*
<i>Source: Florida Department of Education LEA Data *Number is less than 10, including zero</i>		

Total Number of Restraint Incidents by Race/Ethnicity												
School Year	American Indian/Alaskan		Asian		Black		Native Hawaiian/ Other		Two or more races		White	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2012-13	*	*	*	*	25	21%	*	*	*	*	81	68%
2013-14	*	*	*	*	31	27%	*	*	*	*	70	60%

Source: Florida Department of Education Restraint Data \*Number is less than 10, including zero

Total Number of Incidents of Restraint by Grade and Primary Exceptionality										
Year	Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Students in Grades PK-3	Students in Grades 4-8	Students in Grades 9-12	Students with ASD	Students with InD	Students with EBD	Students with SLD	% of Students with Other Disability
2012-13	305	119	39%	51%	9%	26%	5%	38%	9%	22%
2013-14	543	116	56%	41%	3%	29%	3%	35%	8%	24%

Source: Florida Department of Education Restraint Data

ASD – Autism spectrum disorder  
 InD – Intellectual disabilities  
 EBD – Emotional or behavioral disability  
 SLD – Specific learning disability

In addition to the data above, the school district reported the following information regarding restraints during the review of the guiding questions and the action-planning and problem-solving process.

- From August 1, 2013, through October 31, 2013, the district reported 175 restraints, which is 4.9 times higher than the size alike districts and 3.5 times higher than the state average.
- The district reported that from August 19, 2013, through February 11, 2014, there were 327 restraints involving 58 students.
- The district's goal in their 2013-2016 SP&P document included the following:
  - To decrease the number of restraint incidents by three percent for the 2013-2014 school year.
    - o First quarter results reported 87 incidents during the 2012-13 school year and 175 incidents for the 2013-14 school year, which is a **significant increase**.
  - To decrease the use of prone restraint by 10 percent for the 2013-2014 school year.
    - o First quarter results reported a **decrease** of 16 percent in the use of prone restraint.
- The district identified the two schools with the highest number of restraints through the second quarter of the 2013-14 school year. District data reported from August 19, 2013, through December 20, 2014, indicated that there were 115 restraint incidents involving 15 students at KES and 63 incidents involving 11 students at St. Johns County Transition Program School, an alternative school.
- The district reported the following information about KES, where most of the restraints were occurring:
  - The school had a behavioral unit.
  - There was high staff turnover, which resulted in more frequent use of restraint.

- New staff was not fluent with strategies for instructing students who had mental illness.
- New staff members were not able to identify Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (ABCs) in order to analyze crisis events and identify triggers for the students.
- An on-site observation of two students from two additional schools that reported incidents of restraint revealed that the primary communication for one of the students was through eye contact and physical aggression. In addition, one of the students used no verbal communication or gestures, and had a very limited ability to spontaneously request.
- The school district's support for school-level evidence-based practices included the following:
  - Across the district, weekly behavior specialist support was provided at most schools; students who had been restrained were reviewed at monthly crisis team meetings; ESE students with significant issues were reviewed at MTSS teams; prone restraint review forms were being used to ensure a match between restraint patterns, IEP and the BIP; and quarterly fidelity checks were completed for students and schools that used restraint.
  - At KES, weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) with district program specialists were held to address instructional issues; additional on-site support was provided from the district mental health counselor and the district behavior specialist and teachers completed de-escalation interviews with students to determine the best strategies to use when students were upset, which should inform behavior plans.
  - Trauma Informed Care training was scheduled for the summer of 2014 and throughout the 2014-15 school year. The purpose of the training was to teach staff to be aware of past and present traumas that could influence students' responses in varied situations. In addition, the training should result in more thoughtful approaches to student behavior.
  - Behavior Tools training and certification for staff working in self-contained behavior units and ASD classrooms was scheduled for the 2014-15 school year. The purpose of training was to teach staff how to react in the moment to build relationships and de-escalate misbehavior.
- Activities that are occurring in the school district in regard to implementing the strategies in the SP&P document include the following.
  - The school-based LEA (or designee) was responsible for collecting data in the web-based reporting system and informing the school principal that an incident had occurred. At the district level, the ESE director (or designee) reviewed each draft incident report in the web-based reporting system and provided feedback to the school regarding clarity of the information.
  - Within 24 hours of an incident (excluding weekends and holidays), a draft incident report should be entered in the web-based reporting system. The draft is then reviewed at the district level and finalized in the web-based reporting system by the school-based LEA (or designee).
  - The ESE director (or designee) monitored school practices by reviewing each web-based draft report, reviewing monthly Crisis Team Meeting forms and reviewing Prone Review forms. These documents should capture the problem-solving process that takes place at the school level.
  - Staff trained in the district-approved crisis management system at each school serve as members of the school's crisis team. They are expected to meet approximately once per month to review the monthly data report from the district, review restraint incidents at the school from the web-based system and determine next steps for reducing the need for restraint. The team invites the classroom teacher and the school-based LEA to participate in the meeting. When the classroom teacher and or the LEA are unable to attend, the team documents how these individuals are informed regarding the team's decisions.

## Discipline (Suspensions and Expulsions)

Discipline risk ratios by racial or ethnic group are calculated for students with disabilities by dividing the discipline rate of a specific racial or ethnic group by the rate of all nondisabled students. (For example: A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that, for instance, black students with disabilities are equally likely to be suspended or expelled as all nondisabled students.) The following chart indicates that students with disabilities in St. Johns County School District whose race is black are **9.35** more likely to be suspended or expelled as all nondisabled students.

Discipline Risk Ratios by Race or Ethnicity		
Race	2012-13 School Year	
	State	St. Johns
White	0.74	1.72
Black	2.50	<b>9.35</b>
Hispanic	0.76	*
Asian	*	*
American Indian and Alaskan Native	1.27	*
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Island	*	*
Two or more races	1.29	*

*Cells with asterisks indicate that there are fewer than 10 students with disabilities for a specific race/ethnic group suspended or expelled for greater than 10 days.*

*Source: Discipline Data - Risk Ratios for SPP Indicator 4B by District 2012-13*

The school district reported the following during a review of the guiding questions and the action-planning and problem-solving process regarding the number of black students with disabilities who were suspended or expelled for greater than 10 days.

- 2011-12 school year – 8.99 risk ratio
- 2012-13 school year – 9.35 risk ratio
- As of October 31, 2013 – 12.90 risk ratio
- As of January 27, 2014 – 11.74 risk ratio
- The district reviewed information for six students who were suspended more than ten days during the 2013-14 school year and determined the following.
  - The six students were black males who attended different schools.
  - These six students accounted for one percent of all black students with disabilities, 0.1 percent of all students with disabilities and 0.02 percent of all students in the district.
  - Four students were identified as students with a specific learning disability; one student was identified as a student with an emotional or behavioral disorder; and one student was identified as a student with an intellectual disability.
  - Four were middle school students; two were high school students; and one student attended an alternative school.
  - One student was in grade six; two students were in grade seven; one student was in each of grades nine, 10 and 11.
  - The students in grade seven and eight were over age for their grade level.

In regard to how school-level evidence-based practices are being supported by the school district, specifically related to the suspension and expulsion of black students with disabilities, the school district's responses to the guiding questions included the following.

- Most deans had participated in the one- or two-day training for certification in Behavior Tools.
- The district provided two additional staff to present the Behavior Tools training and is scheduling additional trainings for the program schools.
- When a student with a disability accumulates a total of five days in school suspension (ISS) or out of school suspension (OSS), a district behavior specialist completes a screening report that summarizes the student's profile (records, interviews with the student and the parent) and makes recommendations for the next steps. The LEA is provided this report and makes recommendations for the next steps and copies the results to the district office. This provides the leg work that the LEA will need to champion recommended next steps at the school level.
- The district reported difficulty obtaining accurate data for SPP indicator 4B during the 2012-13 school year due to conflicting data systems used by the district ESE and Student Services. The district now has a district wide database that allows schools to run their ISS and OSS data for students with disabilities at any time. The district sends a quarterly email reminding schools to run the report and review their data.
- The ESE and Student Services departments have collaborated on training related to ISS and OSS for students with disabilities for deans (statistics and alternatives to suspension) and reviewed data with administrators at some schools (statistics, district risk ratio). In addition, information will be disseminated at principal meetings, assistant principal meetings and ESE virtual meetings on a regular basis.
- The district plans to hire an additional district behavior specialist for the 2014-15 school year to ensure that ISS and OSS reports are consistently delivered to schools in a timely fashion. This would also allow more time to mentor other staff members at the school level.
- Monitoring of ESE students with OSS will be a priority for school administrators. Progress will be measured monthly by reviewing whether principals submitted their responses for the five-day suspension report for ESE students and information regarding SPP indicators 4A and 4B for the superintendents' monthly suspension report.

In regard to implementing the strategies in the SP&P document related to discipline risk ratios of students with disabilities, by race or ethnicity, the school district reported the following:

- MTSS problem-solving teams are becoming part of school culture. They receive district support and coaching along the way. The teams include a school psychologist and a district behavior specialist.
- Information and data regarding SPP indicator 4B (ISS and OSS) is disseminated at principal meetings, assistant principal meetings and ESE virtual meetings on a regular basis.
- District behavior specialists have provided trainings at specific schools as well as district wide trainings.

Interviews with school-level administrators, conducted for the purpose of identifying factors that may contribute to the high number of black students who were suspended for 10 or more days, reported the following:

- The need for more district social workers
- The need for training for staff members regarding "new patterns of thinking"
- Additional training and support at the middle school level where many of the teachers with little experience begin their work in the district
- Continuation of sports programs for the students



- Continuation of community meetings with inspirational leaders

### ***Commendations***

1. The standard diploma rate for students with disabilities exceeds the rate of other districts in this enrollment group, as well as the state average.
2. The school district's dropout rate of two percent is below the enrollment group and state averages for all students with disabilities and below the enrollment group and state averages for students with EBD and SLD.
3. The school district's rate for students with disabilities in higher education, competitively employed or continuing education exceeds the rate of other districts in this enrollment group, as well as the state average.

### **ESE Monitoring and Compliance**

#### ***Records Review***

Bureau staff reviewed records of eight students in the school district, from a sampling of four schools. Standards from the IEP Implementation and restraint 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 St. Johns 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. An action plan was developed "to decrease the significant number of student behaviors resulting in restraint in the schools that require the most support and "to decrease the significant disproportionality of black students with disabilities who are suspended greater than ten days."

The school district's action plan included the following.

- Obtain additional information regarding problem solving for **restraint**.
  - Reevaluate size-alike comparison data using overall enrollment, enrollment by disability and type to inform the graphs (relative risk ratios, comparisons, etc.).
  - Look at EBD enrollment in comparison districts and changes in ESE student populations.
  - Review the value added model scores of the teachers in the behavior units to determine if the teachers are reluctant to work in behavior units due to lower evaluations.
  - Develop a form similar to the de-escalation interview form to identify student triggers and critical components of PCM.
- Address the staff turnover at KES and the need for professional development.
  - New staff and substitutes may not have the background and training provided to the rest of the staff at the beginning of the year.
  - The pool of applicants for instructional support staff may not include persons with expertise to meet the students' behavioral needs.
  - Early hiring for the behavior unit at KES should result in a pool of applicants with specific expertise to meet the needs of the students in the behavior unit which should help reduce the turnover rate.

- At-risk funds will be used to hire additional staff for the behavior units at KES. Hiring staff that can support KES staff with the documentation and reporting requirements may help with teacher motivation, or make their positions more appealing to future applicants.
- Explore the idea of monthly PLCs for the behavior unit staff to provide opportunities for collaboration and support and self-assessment.
- Speak with principal at KES about becoming a PBS school.
- Provide training for KES staff that includes strategies for students with an autism spectrum disorder.
- Continue provision of Trauma Informed Care training that was provided during the summer of 2014 and will continue during the 2014-2015 school year.
- Obtain additional information for problem solving for **SPP Indicator 4B**.
  - Identify patterns in subgroups of students; evaluate relative risk by ethnicity, race, ESE status and gender, and determine which students receive free and reduced lunch.
  - Identify measures that are more stable than the risk ratio that may be used for progress monitoring of OSS.
  - Continue to capture information needed to support and or refute hypotheses for the increase in 4B.
- Continue to gather and analyze administrator philosophies toward suspension and students' access to alternative supports and competing initiatives that may negatively impact sustaining a focus on suspension as a high priority.
- Revise the superintendent's report regarding the district's 4B data.
  - Look at the current suspension report that the superintendent receives every month to see if indicators 4A and 4B are included and whether they can be added.
  - The new superintendent's report will graph the district risk ratio on SPP Indicator 4A and 4B on a month-by-month basis, and provide each school's contribution to the graph in a table. The table will list the schools' numbers of general education students and ESE students who were suspended.
  - This report will be shared at the monthly principals' meeting.
- Continue current procedures related to the five-day OSS reports.
  - The first time a student identified as ESE reaches a total of five days OSS, behavior interventionists provide a report to the school that summarizes the student's suspension patterns and provides recommendations for future support (change in IEP goals, etc.).
  - The school LEA selects a method and strategy for following up with the student from that list of recommendations.
  - Once the school has selected the new strategy, principals will be required to submit information on the students on a monthly basis to the ESE director, the program specialist for EBD and the superintendent.
  - A staff member will be assigned to review the five-day OSS reports (submitted by the schools) and update the district team on the status of schools' plans.
  - Behavior specialists will send reminder emails to principals for the five-day OSS follow-up.

In a follow-up meeting with the district on April 21, 2014, barriers were identified that need to be addressed.

- District personnel noted that some school-based administrators did not concur that the data regarding SPP indicator 4B suspensions warranted a district wide systemic approach since the number of impacted students was very small at their respective schools.
- The issues regarding SPP indicator 4B are a part of a systemic problem, and to impact this outcome, change is needed on a systemic basis beyond the scope of influence of ESE.

On September 19, 2014, the district provided an update regarding the action plan.

- By winter break of the 2014-15 school year, the district will phase out the use of PCM and begin using Crisis Prevention Institute’s Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (CPI). The district’s alternative school will continue using both PCM and CPI. As of September 2014, 94 staff members have been trained in CPI, which the district identified as approximately one-half of the team members.
- The district indicated that 24 students selected from the 2013-14 school year 4B data are being tracked during the 2014-15 school year. District behavior specialists review the students on a regular basis along with each school’s MTSS problem-solving teams to verify progress and determine what supports may be needed. In addition, this information and data will be tracked by the district.
- When a student with a disability accumulates a total of five days of ISS or OSS, the following process has been implemented to track the student:
  - The district behavior specialist completes a report that summarizes the student’s discipline pattern from previous and current school years.
  - The district reviews 504/IEP/BIP/Response to Intervention reports to see if any patterns are being addressed.
  - The student and the parents are interviewed.
  - Recommendations are made by the district behavior specialist to ensure a match between the behavior and the intervention(s).
  - The report is provided to school administration that provides information on how the school followed up with the students.
  - As of the 2014-15 school year, the deputy superintendent for operations has requested that schools provide the district ESE office their follow-up response within 10 business days.
  - The school district requires that all suspensions be reviewed over the phone with the deputy superintendent for operations and the director of school services for an ESE student who accumulates five days of OSS (or will reach five-days of OSS with the current suspension). Lower level offenses require prior approval before assigning the suspension. Zero tolerance offenses can proceed, but the suspension must be reviewed as soon as possible. There were several meetings across the district to promote the change. This practice is resulting in schools thoughtfully considering their suspensions.
- The district reported 59 incidents of restraint involving 24 students from August 19, 2013, through September 18, 2013. From August 19, 2014, through September 18, 2014, the district reported 68 incidents involving 24 students, which is an **increase** in the incidents of restraints.
- From August 19, 2014, through September 19, 2014, there were only seven students over the prior year with five or more days of ISS and OSS combined. There are no students that had 11 or more days of OSS. These seven students will be screened by the district behavior specialist at the end of the month.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>Restraint</b>	
Summary:	Based on 2013-14 school year data, the district’s number of restraint incidents is almost five times higher than the average of other size-alike districts. The number of students being restrained is over 2.25 times higher than other size-alike districts.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
Required Actions:	<p>By February 2, 2015, the school district shall inform the bureau regarding the status of the collaborations with each of the following discretionary projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district shall collaborate with Positive Behavior Support: Multi-tiered System of Supports (PBS:MTSS) in order to build the school district's capacity to better assist schools <b>to develop effective discipline, social skills teaching and behavior support strategies for all students.</b></li> <li>• The district shall continue to collaborate with SEDNET regarding <b>facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk students and students with EBD and their families.</b></li> <li>• The district shall collaborate with the CARD and Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism Teacher Partnership and FDLRS <b>to provide professional development for teachers of students with ASD.</b> The professional development should include: analysis of functions of severe problem behavior and strategies for providing support for the students.</li> </ul> <p>By February 2, 2015, the district is to provide the bureau with an update on the progress due to implementation of the actions determined at the problem-solving sessions.</p>
<b>Discipline</b>	
Summary:	<p>Black students with disabilities in the district are more likely to be suspended or expelled as compared to all nondisabled students. Below are risk ratios that far exceed the state limit of 3.0.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2012-13 school year – 9.35 risk ratio</li> <li>• As of October 31, 2013 – 12.90 risk ratio</li> <li>• As of January 27, 2014 – 11.74 risk ratio</li> </ul>
Required Actions:	<p>By February 2, 2015, the school district shall inform the bureau regarding the status of the collaborations with each of the following discretionary projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district shall collaborate with PBS:MTSS in order to build the school district's capacity to better assist schools <b>to develop effective discipline, social skills teaching and behavior support strategies for all students.</b></li> <li>• The district shall continue to collaborate with SEDNET regarding <b>facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk students and students with EBD and their families.</b></li> </ul> <p>By February 2, 2015, the district is to provide the bureau with an update on the progress due to implementation of the actions determined at the problem-solving sessions.</p>
Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process	

### Next Steps

#### Summary

- Additional action planning and problem solving for other priorities for the school district in regard to restraint and discipline will be scheduled by the SST liaison for the school district and the ESE director.
- By March 30, 2015, the SST team, 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.

## Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support for Behavior: Recommended Practices for School and District Leaders** (Florida's PBS Project) may be accessed at [http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/RTIB%20Guide%20101811\\_final.pdf](http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/RTIB%20Guide%20101811_final.pdf) and provides an overview of the critical components of an MTSS for behavior. These critical components describe systems changes that are necessary for a results-driven ESE system.
2. The district's **ESE Policies and Procedures** document provides district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual, physical or mechanical restraint and seclusion developed by the FDOE. The school district's document for the 2013-14 through 2015-16 school years may be accessed at <http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx>.
3. The technical assistance paper entitled **Guidelines for the Use, Documentation, Reporting, and Monitoring of Restraint and Seclusion with Students with Disabilities**, dated October 14, 2011, may be accessed at <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6212/dps-2011-165.pdf>. This document provides guidance regarding the use, documenting, reporting and monitoring of restraint and seclusion with students with disabilities in school districts, including (a) when restraint or seclusion might be used, (b) considerations when selecting a training program for restraint, (c) what should be documented, (d) parent notification and reporting, and (e) monitoring use. It also contains information about s. 1003.573, F.S., Use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities.
4. The United States Department of Education, in collaboration with the United States Department of Justice, released **School Discipline Guidance in the January 2014, Volume 4, Issue 1 of the Office of Special Education Programs Monthly Update**. This package will assist states, districts and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate, and ensure those policies and practices comply with federal law. The resource documents listed below are included in the package, and are available at <http://www.ed.gov/school-discipline>.
  - **Dear Colleague** guidance letter on civil rights and discipline
  - **Guiding Principles** document that draws from emerging research and best practices
  - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources** that indexes federal technical assistance and other resources
  - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations** that catalogue State laws and regulations related to school discipline

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

**2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance**

**State Support Team for St. Johns County School District**

**Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

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## **Appendix A**

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



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

1. What are the most current data levels on each of the targeted BEESS indicators?
2. What is the gap between BEESS expected level(s) of targeted indicators and your district's current level(s) of targeted indicators?
3. Do data indicate equity issues related to restraint or OSS greater than 10 days? Are there other subgroups for which receipt of restraints or OSS greater than 10 days is more or less problematic?
  - Gender
  - Race or ethnic group
  - Economically disadvantaged
  - General education students
  - Students with disabilities (by each sub-group)
  - English language learners
  - Comparison within and across above sub-groups
4. Disaggregate district-level indicator data by schools. Which schools are contributing to total district for each of the targeted BEESS indicators?
5. Are there patterns in the type of schools (elementary, middle school, high school or alternative schools) that are contributing to the district totals for each of the targeted BEESS indicators?
6. Disaggregate school-level indicator data for each grade level served. Which grades are contributing to school totals for each of the targeted BEESS indicators?
7. What evidence-based practices are currently planned for use at the school that may address restraint and OSS greater than 10 days?
8. To what extent are these practices being implemented with fidelity in each school? How do you know?
9. Are the expected evidence-based practices sufficient to reduce or eliminate the identified gap on each BEESS indicator? What evidence led you to this conclusion?
10. If expected evidence-based practices are not occurring or not occurring sufficiently, why not? (What are some potential barriers that prevented sufficient implementation of those practices?)
11. What resources are needed to implement these practices with fidelity?
12. How are school-level evidence-based practices specific to restraint and OSS greater than 10 days being supported by the district?
13. To what extent are these district supports implemented with fidelity throughout the district? How do you know?
14. Are district supports for school-level practices sufficient to ensure effective implementation of the identified evidence-based practices related to restraints and OSS greater than 10 days? How do you know?
15. If district supports are not occurring or not occurring sufficiently, why not? (What are some potential barriers specific to effective district support on the targeted BEESS indicators?)
16. What resources are needed to provide effective district support sufficiently for all schools?

17. What strategies, initiatives and resources have been identified in the District Improvement and Assistance Plan (DIAP) with regard to achieving annual measureable objective targets for students with disabilities?
18. As applicable, has the mid-year reflection based on mid-year assessment data been completed and what, if any, adjustments have been made to the DIAP with regard to strategies to improve outcomes for students with disabilities?
19. What does the ESE Policies and Procedures document reflect regarding the targeted BEESS indicators? Did the district achieve the goal set during the prior year?
20. What is occurring with regard to implementing the strategies in the ESE Policies and Procedures document with regard to targeted indicator performance?
21. Are there any other initiatives or systems in place that can help address the targeted BEESS indicators?
22. Based on all of the above answers, what priorities will be targeted to improve BEESS targeted indicators?
23. What resources are needed to address each priority?
24. What potential barriers do you anticipate as you address these priority targets?

**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.

ABC	Antecedent-Behavior Consequence
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
BEESS	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
BIP	Behavioral intervention plan
BPIE	Best Practices for Inclusive Education
CARD	Center for Autism and Related Disorders
CEIS	Coordinated early intervening services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CPI	Crisis Prevention Institute's Nonviolent Crisis Intervention
DIAP	District Improvement and Assistance Plan
EBD	Emotional behavioral disability
ESE	Exceptional student education
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
FDLRS	Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
InD	Intellectual Disability
ISS	In-school-suspension
KES	Ketterlinus Elementary School
LEA	Local educational agency
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of support
OSS	Out-of-school suspension
PCM	Professional Crisis Management
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
PBS:MTSS	Positive Behavior Support/Multi-tiered System of Supports
PLC	Professional learning communities
SEDNET	Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities
SLD	Specific learning disability
SP&P	Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures
SPP	State Performance Plan
SST	State Support Team



*Pam Stewart, Commissioner*  
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