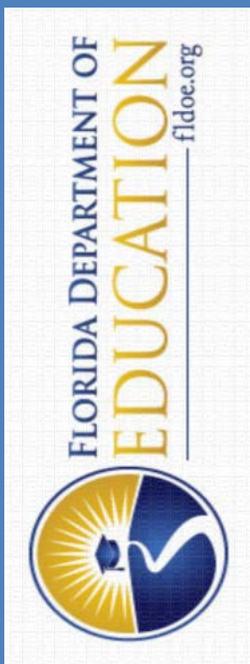


**2015-16 Exceptional Student Education
Monitoring and Assistance
On-Site Visit Report**

**Gadsden County School District
November 18-20, 2015**



This publication is produced through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), Division of K-12 Public Schools, Florida Department of Education (FDOE), and is available online at <http://www.fl DOE.org/e se/mon-home.asp>. For information on available resources, contact the BEES Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

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February 19, 2016

Mr. Reginald C. James, Superintendent
Gadsden County School District
35 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Quincy, Florida 32351-4411

Dear Superintendent James:

The Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) is pleased to provide you with the 2015-16 Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Report for Gadsden 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 November 18-20, 2015. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, local educational agency profiles, and an action-planning and problem-solving process.

The Gadsden County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas: graduation rates, dropout rates and least restrictive environment. The on-site visit was conducted by a State Support Team (SST) that included BEESS staff and discretionary project staff.

The 2015-16 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, career and life 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.

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

Superintendent James
February 19, 2016
Page Two

Ms. Sharon Thomas, Director of ESE, and her staff were very helpful to the SST in preparing for the on-site visit and throughout the on-site visit. In addition, school-level personnel welcomed SST members and demonstrated a continued commitment to the education of students in the school district. This report will be posted on the BEESS website and may be accessed at <http://www.fl DOE.org/e se/mon-home.asp>.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services to exceptional education students in the Gadsden 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monica Verra-Tirado". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a rectangular box.

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

Enclosure

cc: Sharon Thomas
Heidi Metcalf
Judy White

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Gadsden County School District

November 18-20, 2015

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**2015-16 Exceptional Student Education (ESE)
Monitoring and Assistance
On-Site Visit Report**

Gadsden County School District

November 18-20, 2015

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 ESE laws (sections 1001.03(3), 1003.571 and 1008.32, Florida Statutes [F.S.]) and rules. 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]). BEESS 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, BEESS 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 who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic or behavioral supports in order to succeed in a general education environment. These children should include particularly, but not exclusively, children in those groups that were significantly over-identified.

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 ESE Policies and Procedures (SP&P) document.

ESE Monitoring and Assistance Process

Background Information

The 2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process focuses on those State Performance Plan 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 (K) through Grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in K through Grade 3) 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 on the FDOE website.
- Seclusion – Rate of incidents of seclusion, as reported on the FDOE website.

The 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). **The first on-site visit was conducted on October 22-23, 2013.**
- 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.

In a letter dated September 21, 2015, the Superintendent of the Gadsden County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: graduation rates, dropout rates and least restrictive environment (LRE).

School Selection

Upon review of the school district's data it was determined that the monitoring and assistance process would involve the following schools for school-level focus groups, student focus groups, and school walk-through debriefings:

- East Gadsden High School
- West Gadsden Middle High School
- James Shank Elementary and Middle School

On-Site Activities

On-Site Visit Team

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

FDOE, BEESS

- Judy White, Secondary Transition Specialist, Instructional Support Services, BEESS lead
- Tonya Milton, Program Planner/Analyst, Student Support Services
- Malisha McPhaul, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring

Bureau Discretionary Projects

- Amber Brundage, Problem-Solving Facilitator, Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Beth Hardcastle, Problem-Solving Facilitator, PS:Rtl
- Tury Lewis, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network
- Eydie Tricquet, Director, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources Systems Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Kelly Claude, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Greg Gillman, Project Facilitator, State Personnel Development Grant

Data Collection

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session on day one with district and school-level staff – 20 participants
- School-level administrator focus group – 16 participants
- Teacher focus group – 30 participants
- School walk-through debriefing – 14 classrooms visited
- Student focus groups – 15 participants
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 25 participants

Status Update for the 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit

The following information is taken from the **2013-14 on-site monitoring** report. A status update to the required actions and recommendations has been added for each area listed.

Next Steps	
Educational Environment (LRE)	
Summary:	For the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, the Gadsden County School District was below the enrollment group and state averages for regular class placement and was higher than their enrollment group and state averages in separate class placement. However, improvement was noted. The average for regular class placement increased from 49 percent during 2012-13 to 65 percent during 2013-14. The average for separate class placement decreased from 44 percent during 2012-13, to 30 percent during 2013-14.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that improvement strategies in this area, as well as those identified in the Best Practices in Inclusive Education (BPIE) action plan, be continued.
Required Action:	None
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	<p>In 2014-15 regular class placement was 62.5 percent, a slight decrease from the previous year. The district completed the BPIE assessment with FIN facilitators on April 25, 2014. Data was collected regarding leadership and decision-making, instruction and student achievement and communication and collaboration indicators. An initial FIN services plan was developed on May 27, 2014, and included the following goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to hire personnel who hold beliefs that support inclusive practices, the Gadsden ESE Department will encourage the use of specific job interview questions to appraise an applicant's knowledge and beliefs pertaining to best practices for inclusive education throughout the 2014-15 school year. • Gadsden County will disseminate information and materials that refer to students with disabilities reflecting the use of person-first language and will support personnel in the understanding and use of person-first language during the 2014-2015 school year in order to continue to create inclusive environments. • Gadsden ESE Department will review and update all district documents, forms, program material and other communication that refer to students with disabilities to ensure they reflect person-first language by August 2016. • District and school leaders will receive ongoing and current information and professional development about best practices for inclusive education for all students with disabilities during the 2014-15 school year. <p>FIN provided sample interview questions in the late spring, which were used by some principals at the job fair in June 2014. The questions were submitted to the Personnel Director for use throughout the district, but</p>

Next Steps	
	<p>they were not used consistently.</p> <p>Materials regarding person-first language were shared in August 2014 with school staff.</p> <p>The ESE Director distributed <i>Fostering Achievement and Community Together</i> folios, which were provided by FIN, on best practices for inclusive education to administrators in July 2014.</p> <p>Two principals attended the FIN sessions at the Panhandle Area Education Consortium Leadership conference in July 2014.</p>
Graduation and Dropout Rates	
Summary:	<p>For the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, the Gadsden County School District's graduation rate was below that of the enrollment group and state averages. However, the graduation rate increased from 24 to 40 percent in 2012-13. Additional data show that the special diploma rate in 2012-13 was 43.9 percent, more than twice the state rate of 20.3 percent.</p> <p>For the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, at seven percent, the Gadsden County School District's dropout rate was above that of the enrollment group and state rates. (Subsequent to the 2013-14 monitoring and assistance visit, Florida began using the federal dropout rate to measure performance in this area, not the Florida dropout rate.)</p>
Recommendations:	None
Required Action:	<p>Recent legislative changes in Florida that allow all students to earn a standard diploma, combined with a better prepared 2014-15 ninth-grade cohort, should assist in the efforts to improve these results. It is imperative that the district ensure that current ninth-grade students are enrolled in courses that will contribute to their graduation success. Students who participate in the alternate assessment and who are instructed on access points should be enrolled in access or higher level courses. All other students with disabilities pursuing a standard diploma must be enrolled in general education courses. Fundamental, access or ESE courses that have been deleted from the Course Code Directory would not be appropriate courses for enrollment. The district will review course enrollments for all students with disabilities in ninth grade and provide a report to BEESS by February 13, 2015.</p> <p>The district must choose one or more evidence-based practices to reduce the dropout rate and increase the standard diploma graduation rate, and implement with fidelity. In addition, the district should seek support from BEESS, the problem-solving facilitator and discretionary projects, and collaborate to address the graduation and dropout issues.</p> <p>The district will provide quarterly progress reports to the bureau chief, the first of which must be delivered by January 31, 2015.</p>

Next Steps

**Status Update 2013-14
Monitoring Visit:**

Both the federal uniform graduation rate and the dropout rate in Gadsden fluctuate greatly from year to year, unlike the state and the size-alike district rates, which reflect slow but steady improvement.

The district's federal uniform graduation rate increased from 24 percent to 40 percent in 2012-13 and decreased to 26.6 percent during the 2013-14 school year. The 2014-15 graduation rate was not available at the time of the writing of this report.

In 2013-14 the special diploma rate was 30.3 percent, a marked improvement over 2012-13, but well above the state rate of 18.5 percent.

Subsequent to the 2013-14 monitoring and assistance visit, Florida began using the federal dropout rate to measure performance in this area, not the Florida dropout rate. Gadsden has a federal dropout rate higher than the state rate in each of the last four years. The latest data available are from the 2014-15 school year. The state rate was 18.7 percent and Gadsden's rate was 25 percent, a decrease of 8.3 percentage points from 2013-14, when the dropout rate was 33.3 percent, but higher than the rate in 2012-13, which was 19 percent.

A district leadership team, which consisted of Gadsden personnel, representatives from Project 10, the Florida PS:Rtl, Check and Connect, FDLRS and the FIN was established to work on the action plans created during the 2013-14 monitoring and assistance visit. This team met several times since the initial visit to continue the action-planning process and to discuss progress on implementation.

On November 13, 2013, 17 district personnel attended Project 10's *Using School-level Data to Increase Graduation Success of Students with Disabilities* training in Gadsden and another 3 people attended this training on November 19, 2014, at the Institute for Small and Rural Districts.

In early 2015, discretionary project staff visited the high schools to determine what structures, if any, were in place to determine which students were off track. In the spring of 2015 the team identified early warning system (EWS) indicators as well as thresholds for each indicator. Some progress has been made toward establishing an EWS, but there is not yet one in place. It was noted that the district continues to have some issues accessing data, although progress has been made with the district's Skyward system.

Gadsden is committed to implementing *Check and Connect* in all high schools and Shanks Middle School. However, the district decided to change models from a full-time mentor to using existing staff as mentors after two unsuccessful attempts to implement the full-time mentor model. Carter Parramore Academy sent an entire team to *Check and Connect* training in the summer of 2015 and the program is being implemented

Next Steps	
	<p>with fidelity at this time. The administrators at East Gadsden and West Gadsden High Schools are new and have very been cooperative with regard to <i>Check and Connect</i> implementation.</p> <p>Gadsden received mini grants from Project 10 to attend VISIONS 2014 and 2015, the Student Engagement Conference, and the 2015 Project 10 Regional Institute. They also received a Project 10 Connect mini grant each year for interagency activities. Project 10 staff provided training and technical assistance to Gadsden personnel in several areas.</p> <p>BEESS monitored course enrollments for all districts. Gadsden had more students enrolled in ESE courses in 2013-14 than in 2014-15.</p>
18-22 Programs	
Summary:	During the visit to the 18-22 program, it was noted that students were using outdated text books that had been removed from use by a neighboring district. It was also noted that resources for community-based instruction were somewhat restricted.
Recommendations:	The district should review the resources available to the program and make every effort to provide the resources necessary to help the students meet the goal of career readiness.
Required Action:	IEP goals must be aligned with curriculum.
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	Project 10 provided resources to the extended transition program shortly after the 2013-14 on-site visit.
Required IEP Team Members	
Summary:	34 CFR §300.321(a) indicates that members of a student's IEP team must include a general education teacher, if the student is, or may be participating in the regular education environment. General education teachers indicated that they did not always participate in the development of IEPs, and that, under these circumstances, they generally signed IEPs afterward.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that compliance with 34 CFR §300.321 be monitored on a frequent basis.
Required Action:	The district must provide professional development to school administrators and general and special education teachers regarding the required procedures for the attendance of general education teachers at IEP team meetings. Confirmation of these trainings must be provided to BEESS by June 15, 2015, including sign-in sheets with signatures, printed names and title, in addition to the materials used for the training.
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	On August 11, 2015, the district provided documentation of the required training where 47 teachers attended.
Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process	
Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional action planning and problem solving for the school district in regard to the graduation rate, dropout rate and LRE will be scheduled by the SST liaison for the school district and the ESE director.

Next Steps	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By January 20, 2015, the SST team, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan and determine additional next steps, as appropriate.
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	<p>Action-planning and problem-solving work continued from the time of the initial visit until the present. The consistent presence of the same personnel from the PS:Rtl project, Beth Hardcastle and Amber Brundage, has resulted in a strong level of trust and faith in the process in Gadsden.</p> <p>In addition to the other meetings and activities described above, the required evaluation of effectiveness of action plans and determination of next steps took place in Gadsden on January 20, 2015.</p>

2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Results

The following data is related to the focus areas and activities for the 2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit for Gadsden County School District.

Graduation Rates

The Federal Uniform High School Graduation Rate for Students with Disabilities: This calculation uses the number of first-time ninth graders from four years ago, plus incoming transfer students on the same schedule to graduate, minus students from this population who transferred out or left to enroll in a private school or home education, divided by the number of standard diplomas from the same group. The district's federal uniform graduation rate for the 2013-14 school year is **below** the state rate.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Gadsden	23.9%	40.0%	26.2%
State	47.7%	52.3%	55.1%

Dropout Rates

The Federal Dropout Rate for Students with Disabilities: The number of students who exited special education due to dropping out, divided by the number of students who graduated with a regular high school diploma, special diploma, certificate of completion, special certificate of completion, dropped out or died. The district's dropout rate for students with disabilities the 2013-14 school year is **above** the state rate.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Gadsden	34.7%	19.0%	33.3%
State	21.1%	20.3%	19.2%

Educational Environment

LRE: To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with students without disabilities. The LRE calculation is based on the number of students with disabilities ages 6 through 21 served inside the regular class for 80 percent or more of the day divided by the total number of students with disabilities ages 6 through 21 reported in October (Survey 2). The data do not include parentally placed private school students or students served in the Florida county jails, in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice facilities or in the Florida Department of Corrections. The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class is **below** the state rate.

Students with Disabilities in Regular Class

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Gadsden	48.9%	64.8%	62.3%
State	70.7%	71.3%	74.4%

Interviews Conducted

Student Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted student focus groups at East Gadsden High School, West Gadsden High School and Shanks Middle School. Topics included: courses, career goals, assistance received to prepare for life after high school, why students drop out, what the schools could do to help and resources and services needed.

Comments from the students included the following:

East Gadsden High School

- All of the students reported having concrete primary and secondary career goals. All but one student had spoken with at least one adult at the school regarding how to achieve their goals.
- Only one student had considered dropping out and taking the GED® test.
- The students were not aware of the number of credits they had or what they needed to graduate, but they named an adult at the school who knew this information and kept them on track.
- The students were appreciative of the Edgenuity program, which allowed them to catch up on credits, and one student mentioned asking for and receiving extra tutoring.
- Students indicated that they would like more opportunities for social interaction, such as more clubs and social events like school-sponsored dances.
- The students indicated that having more teachers employed at the school would be helpful.

West Gadsden High School

- All but one student indicated that they were planning to attend college, and only one student had a specific career goal.
- The students noted that some teachers were helpful and could “break it down” for students, but others were perceived as less helpful, even when asked for assistance. The students indicated that some teachers did not know about their accommodations.
- Most of the students had not attended an IEP team meeting.
- Only a few students had personally thought about dropping out of school, but they all knew students who had dropped out.
- The students noted the following reasons for staying in school: wanting to continue their education; wanting to participate in sports, band and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps; as

- well as spending time with friends and parental pressure.
- Students reported that they wanted the school to add more social activities and other enrichment opportunities and suggested adding driver education, technology and nursing classes, as well as more clubs, games, dances and other celebration activities.
- Students were clear on why some students received suspensions, but expressed concern that students were not given school work during times of suspension and that the punishment was not helpful.

James Shanks Middle School

- All but one of the students reported having a concrete goal for after graduation.
- All students reported that their parents and teachers had spoken to them about their goals.
- Two students had participated in IEP team meetings.
- All of the students indicated that they had someone to talk to both in and out-of-school if needed.
- The students suggested that the school could offer motivation for students to stay in school by providing support and listening to their needs.
- The students also requested additional social activities such as dances.
- All students reported that their classes were a mixture of students with and without disabilities.
- There was general consensus that the students received the support needed from their teachers.

Teacher Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups included general and exceptional education teachers from the following schools:

East Gadsden High School (9 teachers)

West Gadsden High School (7 teachers)

Themes that evolved from the interviews and focus group with the teachers included the following:

- Participants indicated the importance of parental support and involvement, which they indicated has improved in some ways, but was still lacking in others. The teachers noted that with new administrators in place, the culture of the schools was changing and parents now seemed to be more welcomed in the schools.
- Participants indicated that many factors have contributed to the low graduation and high dropout rates in the district, including poor attendance; teen-parent responsibilities; lack of parental support, including parents leaving the decision to the student as to whether to attend school; the need for remedial education; and the increase in required testing. Teachers also indicated that some students simply refused to be tested. In addition, attendance issues related to the migrant population in one school were noted.
- Participants indicated that positive supports and interventions are available for students, including support facilitators who help keep students on task and follow up with teachers, the use of Edgenuity, involvement in 21st Century program, and provision of classroom accommodations. In addition, participants indicated that the presence of employment specialists, support for students and teachers from the principal, and the use of para-professionals have helped.
- Participants expressed that additional supports would be welcomed, such as professional development on differentiated instruction and teaching strategies, more technology, including tablets, and the provision of unstructured time for the students.

James Shank Middle School (13 teachers)

Themes that evolved from the interviews and focus group with the teachers included the following:

- Participants indicated that the ESE students are not prepared for the transition from fifth grade to six grade as most of the ESE students were receiving the majority of instruction in a self-contained classroom.
- Participants indicated there was a lack of support for students with disabilities who were receiving their core instruction in the general education setting. The general education teachers would like more support for these students.
- Participants reported that services and supports in place included support facilitators and behavior specialists but there are not enough of them.
- Participants indicated that having additional supports or resources, including planning time with teachers and support facilitators, more in-class support from ESE teachers and paraprofessionals, training and professional development in differentiated instruction and dealing with behavior issues, providing a social skills curriculum for all students, hiring more staff, applying more effort to motivate and engage students, imparting a mind-shift change for students and parents regarding high expectations, and providing more assistance to students as they transition from one level to the next would be useful.

Administrator Focus Groups

Two administrator focus groups were held, in which a total of 16 administrators participated. The ESE Director and administrators from East Gadsden High School, West Gadsden High School and Carter Parramore Academy participated in a focus group that discussed graduation and dropout. Administrators from Shanks Middle School and Stewart Street Elementary School and two district ESE program specialists discussed LRE.

Themes that evolved from the interviews and focus groups with the administrators included the following:

- Participants indicated they are attempting to include more students with disabilities in the general environment, but perceive that general education teachers fear behavior issues.
- Participants indicated that barriers to graduation include teen pregnancy, testing changes, more rigorous general education requirements and high student absenteeism. Participants noted that many students are behind a few grade levels.
- Participants indicated that supports and interventions that are available include positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS) activities, support facilitation, administrative conferences, use of peer assistants, data chats with counselors and administrators, audit information at the end of each nine-week period, a social worker who attempts to retrieve students who drop out of school, use of Edgenutiy and technology, involvement in the 21st Century program, and summer tutoring.
- Participants noted that additional supports that would be helpful are more teachers, especially those certified through colleges of education; social skills education; supports for students and teachers to help with transitioning from one level to the next; and professional development for teachers on behavior issues and differentiating instruction.

School Walk-Through Debriefing

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at East Gadsden High School, West Gadsden High School, and Shanks Elementary and Middle School. A total of 14 classrooms were visited. The following best practices were noted during the walk-throughs:

- Most classrooms were orderly and organized to reduce distractions or barriers to learning.
- Student-teacher ratios appeared appropriate.

- Structured activities were observed in all classrooms.
 - Teachers appeared to be engaging their students; positive student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions were observed in the majority of classes visited.
 - A variety of student groupings were observed, including independent study, as well as small and large groups.
 - Evidence of celebrating student success was noted in almost all the middle school classrooms.
 - Safety and security measures appeared to be in place in all schools.
 - Smart boards were in use by students and teachers; however, tablets and computers were not observed being routinely used.
 - Self-contained ESE classrooms had reduced adult-student ratios.
 - Some classrooms had observable goals, rules and expectations posted.

Commendations

1. Based on the 2013-14 statewide parent survey, 82 percent of parents in Gadsden County with a preschool child, receiving special education services, report that schools facilitate parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities as compared to the state rate of 73 percent.
2. Regarding indicator State Performance Plan 4A and 4B, the district suspended and or expelled fewer than 10 students in the 2013-14 school year for greater than 10 school days.
3. The district's federal dropout rate decreased from 33.3 percent in 2013-14 to 25 percent in 2014-15.
4. The district's BPIE and FIN services plan were completed in 2014.
5. The district provides credit recovery programs to help increase the graduation rate.
6. One hundred percent of the district's transition IEPs were found compliant during the 2014-15 self-assessment process.

2015-16 Action-Planning and Problem-Solving Process and Next Steps

As part of the monitoring and assistance on-site visit, the on-site team members, ESE director and representatives from Gadsden County School District participated in a problem-solving and action-planning process. The group reviewed the data collected and selected improving the graduation rate as the priority goal. The group elected to address the lack of team collaboration at the district and school level to support data-based problem solving to increase the percentage of students on track to graduate from high school, college, career and life ready. They brainstormed strategies to reduce or eliminate this obstacle. In an effort to continue the momentum of the visit, the first meeting was scheduled for December 1, 2015.

Next Steps	
Graduation rates	
Summary:	Based on the 2013-14 school year data, the graduation rate in Gadsden is significantly lower than size-alike and state rates. In addition, the rate fluctuates greatly from year to year. Gadsden also has a high special diploma rate. The district was visited in 2013-2014 for this indicator. A district leadership team, which included discretionary project staff, was established to continue the work of the visit. Some progress has been made.

	It was noted that many more general education staff participated in the 2015-16 visit than did in the 2013-14 visit and that the ESE staff appeared to have better access to data, via the Skyward system, than during the past visit.
Recommendations:	As the special diploma is no longer an option for current ninth- and tenth-grade students, immediate emphasis should be placed on training all teachers to support students with disabilities to succeed in the general education curriculum. Continue to work with the district leadership team.
Required Action:	Provide professional development to better prepare teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities no later than August 5, 2016 . Documentation regarding the provision of the training must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison.
Dropout Rates	
Summary:	The dropout rate in Gadsden is significantly higher than size-alike and state rates and the rate fluctuates greatly from year to year.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that the Gadsden County School District choose an EWS and implement it in all middle and high schools and continue to work with <i>Check and Connect</i> staff toward full implementation.
Required Action:	By April 29, 2016 , the district is to provide its BEESS liaison with an update on the specific progress made toward implementation of the EWS for students with disabilities.
LRE	
Summary:	In 2014-15, regular class placement was 62.5 percent, a slight decrease from the previous year, and above the state average of 74.4 percent.
Recommendations:	The district should review the technical assistance paper entitled, <i>2016-13 Least Restrictive Environment Considerations Related to Individual Educational Plans</i> .

Required Actions:	<p>The district must review their LRE data and explore options for educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom with sufficient supports in place. The district is required to provide professional development that includes flexible scheduling at the elementary, middle, and high school levels which focuses on how students' learning needs can be met in the general education classroom. Confirmation of these trainings must be provided to the BEESS liaison by August 5, 2016, including sign-in sheets with signatures, printed names and title, in addition to the materials used for the training.</p> <p>The district should continue to work on the goals established with FIN, update district services plan and complete all school-level BPIEs by September 30, 2016, and provide a report to the district's BEESS liaison no later than October 10, 2016, describing the number of school level BPIEs that have been completed.</p>
Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process	
Summary:	<p>By September 9, 2016, the ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan and determine additional next steps, as appropriate. Documentation of this evaluation should be provided to the district's BEESS liaison.</p>

Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Behavior: Recommended Practices for School and District Leaders** (Florida's PBIS Project) may be accessed at 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 **SP&P** 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 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 which draws from emerging research and best practices;
 - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources**, which indexes federal technical assistance and other resources; and
 - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations**, which catalogs state laws and regulations related to school discipline.
5. **The Project 10: Transition Education Network** (<http://project10.info>) assists Florida school districts and relevant stakeholders in building capacity to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve their academic success and post school outcomes. Project 10 serves as the primary conduit between BEESS and school-district personnel in addressing law and policy, effective practices and research-based interventions in the area of transition services for youth with disabilities. The project also supports transition initiatives developed through the BEESS Strategic Plan. Examples of assistance provided related to graduation rates include using school-level data for graduation success, technical assistance to improve data collection, analysis, and data-driven decision making, in order to develop a color-coded student graduation tracking system that can be coordinated with existing initiatives or systems. Regarding dropout, the project supports

dropout prevention strategies for students with disabilities; school-based enterprise, service learning, and EWS.

6. **FDLRS Associate Centers Support** may be accessed at www.fdlrs.org. The 19 FDLRS Associate Centers provide an array of instructional and technical support services to school districts statewide. The four central functions of each FDLRS center is Child Find, parent services, human resource development and professional learning and technology. The centers collaborate with districts, agency and support personnel, communities, families, and educational personnel providing support services for educators, school administrators, parents and students with disabilities. Examples of professional development related to graduation rates include Florida standards/access points, differentiated instruction, access to the general curriculum, Strategic Instruction Model, behavior/discipline, Standing up for Me, self-advocacy, responsive classroom, and district specific supports. Professional development related to dropout include differentiated instruction, accommodations, CHAMPs, Tough Kids, discipline in the secondary classroom, support for parent involvement, Professional Development Alternatives for Positive Behavior Support module, Universal Design for Learning, small group planning and problem solving, disability awareness, and district specific supports.
7. **PS:Rtl Technology Project** may be accessed at <http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>. One function of this project provides regional technology coordinators and technology specialists the support to effectively implement accessible instructional materials, assistive technologies, learning technologies, and Universal Design for Learning principles within all tiers of instruction. This project also manages, coordinates and supports the regional assistive technology loan libraries.

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

2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance

State Support Team for Gadsden County School District

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**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.

BEESS	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
BPIE	Best Practices for Inclusive Education
CEIS	Coordinated early intervening services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
FDLRS	Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources Systems Associate Centers
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
LEA	Local educational agency
LRE	Least restrictive environment
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of support
PBIS	Positive Behavior Interventions and Support
PBS:MTSS	Positive Behavior Support: Multi-tiered System of Supports
PS:Rtl	Problem Solving: Response time to Intervention
SP&P	Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures
SST	State Support Team



Pam Stewart, Commissioner
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