

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

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**Highlands County School District  
December 8-10, 2015**



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

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August 9, 2016

Wallace P. Cox, Superintendent  
Highlands County School District  
426 School Street  
Sebring, Florida 33870-4048

Dear Superintendent Cox:

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 Highlands County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site monitoring visit to your school district on December 8-10, 2015. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, local educational agency profiles, and an action-planning and problem-solving process.

The Highlands County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas related to students with disabilities: graduation rate, dropout rate, discipline (4B), least restrictive environment, incidents of seclusion, and transition individual educational plans aligned with postsecondary outcomes. 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.

Ms. Pat Landress, Director of ESE, and her staff were very helpful to the SST in preparing for 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.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp>.

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

Superintendent Cox  
August 9, 2016  
Page Two

Thank you for your commitment to improving services to exceptional education students in the Highlands 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,

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

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief

Enclosure

cc: Pat Landress  
Heidi Metcalf  
Jacqueline Roumou

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

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**December 8-10, 2015**

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

## Table of Contents

Authority.....	1
Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring and Assistance Process .....	1
Background Information.....	1
School Selection.....	2
On-Site Activities.....	3
On-Site Visit Team .....	3
Data Collection .....	3
Status Update for the 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance Visit .....	4
2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Results.....	7
Graduation Rate .....	7
Dropout Rate .....	8
Discipline Rate and Risk Ratio (4B).....	8
Incidents of Seclusion.....	8
Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment).....	9
Transition Individual Educational Plans Aligned with Postsecondary Outcomes .....	9
Interviews Conducted.....	9
Administrator Focus Groups .....	9
Teacher Focus Groups.....	10
Student Focus Groups.....	11
School Walk-Through Debriefings .....	11
Commendations.....	12
2015-16 Action-Planning and Problem-Solving Process and Next Steps .....	12
Technical Assistance .....	15
State Support Team for Highlands County School District .....	16

## **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 (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, BEESS 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, establishes documentation, reporting and monitoring requirements for districts regarding the use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities. It also requires districts to have policies and procedures in place that govern parent notification, incident reporting, data collection and monitoring the use of restraint or seclusion for students with disabilities. As required, FDOE has established district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of restraint and seclusion. These standards are included in each district's Exceptional Student Education 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 (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. In the regular class 80 percent or more of the day
  - B. In 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 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 is composed of planning activities that occur in advance of the first on-site visit to the school district.
- Phase 2 is the initial on-site visit to the selected school district by the state support team (SST). **The initial on-site visit was November 6-8, 2013, and the second visit was on December 8-10, 2015.**
- Phase 3 is follow-up and post-initial visit activities, which 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 is 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 Highlands County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: graduation rate, dropout rate, discipline (4B), least restrictive environment (LRE), incidents of seclusion, and transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes.

### **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 administrator, teacher, and student focus groups and school walk-through debriefings:

- Avon Park High School
- Lake Placid High School
- Sebring High School



- Hill-Gustat Middle School
- Memorial Elementary School

### **On-Site Activities**

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

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

#### **FDOE, BEESS**

- Monica Verra-Tirado, State Director for Special Education, Bureau Chief
- Jacqueline Roumou, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring (lead)
- Jessica Brattain, Program Specialist, Instructional Support Services
- Aimee Mallini, Program Specialist, Bureau Resources and Information Center

#### **FDOE, BEESS Discretionary Projects**

- Amber Brundage, Problem-Solving Facilitator, Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Mary Thomas, Region 3 Facilitator, Project 10: Transition Education Network (Project 10)
- Robyn Vanover, Problem-Solving Facilitator, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Kathy Mathis, Director, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource Systems Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Stephanie Moreo, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Vicki Barnitt, Director of Program Development, FIN
- Mindy Stevens, Coordinator, Center for Autism Related Disabilities
- Lael Engstrom, Project Director, State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)
- Kimberly Swan, Project Facilitator, SPDG
- Heidi Hyche, Director, Keiser University Multidisciplinary Center

### **Data Collection**

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session with district and school-level staff – 30 participants
- School-level administrator focus groups – 17 participants
- Teacher focus groups – 16 participants
- Student focus groups – 14 participants
- School walk-through debriefings – seven classrooms
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 30 participants

The district completed the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with FIN facilitators on December 8, 2014. The services plan included the following goals:

- Increase knowledge on best practice for inclusive education with district team and district BPIE team so that the ESE Director can identify key personnel to support the district on implementation of the BPIE.
- By the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, Highlands County School District will increase their district percentage on educational environment from 67 to 70 percent for

students with disabilities spending 80 percent or more of their week with nondisabled peers, and decrease district percentage from 22 to 19 percent for students with disabilities spending between less than 40 percent of their week with nondisabled peers.

**Status Update for the 2013-14 ESE Monitoring and Assistance 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.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>SPP 1 – Graduation Rate</b>	
Summary	<p>The Highlands County School District was identified as having a low percentage of students with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the 2010-11 school year, the school district’s graduation rate for students with disabilities was 27 percent.</li> <li>• For the 2011-12 school year, the school district’s graduation rate for students with disabilities was 29 percent.</li> <li>• The 2014 LEA Profile identified the graduation rate for the school district as 28 percent for the 2012-13 school year.</li> <li>• For the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, the state’s graduation rates for students with disabilities were 44 percent, 48 percent and 52 percent, respectively.</li> </ul>
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	<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 Highlands County School 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.</p> <p>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 for these students.</p> <p>The Highlands County School District will review course enrollments for all students with disabilities in ninth grade and provide a report to BEESS by <b>March 31, 2015</b>.</p>
<b>Status Update</b>	<p>On March 31, 2015, the district provided BEESS with documentation that included a report that tracked graduation requirements for all their seniors and information regarding a review completed of course enrollments for all students with disabilities entering in the ninth grade for the 2014-15 school year.</p> <p>During the 2014-15 school year, the district worked on its</p>

	<p>interagency agreement with Project 10. In addition, the district received funding for Vision’s Conference, which eight district staff members attended in May 2015 and eight more will attend in 2016.</p> <p>FDLRS (Keiser) provided a Summer Enrichment program at one middle school during the 2014-15 school year and provided training in transition assessments in May 2016.</p> <p>Nine schools were trained in inclusion practices by FIN in August 2015 and three schools have completed the BPIE as of April 2016.</p> <p>Seven schools are currently participating with Check &amp; Connect and school administrators have provided positive feedback.</p>
<p><b>SPP 2 – Dropout Rate</b></p>	
<p>Summary</p>	<p>Between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, the Highlands County dropout rate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the total population of students with disabilities, the rate decreased from 12 to 7 percent.</li> <li>• For students identified with an emotional behavioral disability, the rate decreased from 26 to 14 percent.</li> <li>• For students with an specific learning disability (SLD), the rate decreased from 9 to 8 percent.</li> <li>• Subsequent to the 2013-14 on-site visit, the 2014 LEA Profile revealed that for the 2012-13 school year the dropout rate held steady at 7 percent for the total population of students with disabilities and decreased to 6 percent for students with an SLD.</li> </ul>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>At least quarterly, the Highlands County School District should continue to review data regarding dropout rates and work with the SST and BEESS staff to further reduce the dropout rates for students with disabilities in the school district.</p>
<p>Required Actions</p>	<p>Refer to Phases 3 and 4 below</p>
<p><b>Status Update</b></p>	<p>On March 31, 2015, the district provided BEESS with data regarding the dropout rate for the 2014-15 school year and a copy of its color-coded graduation tracking sheet. The district developed its own early warning system (EWS) during the 2014-15 school year, which is reviewed monthly at the principal’s meeting. Also, high school principals receive Project 10 tracking reports, which include the status of each cohort in terms of students that are on track to graduate, grade point averages and credits.</p>
<p><b>SPP 4 – Discipline</b></p>	
<p>Summary</p>	<p>The discipline risk ratio for students with disabilities in the Highlands County School District who were suspended or expelled for greater than 10 days far exceeds the state rate for the 2010-11 through 2012-13 school years. The school district’s discipline risk ratios for these three years were 3.93, 3.70 and 3.41, compared to the state’s risk ratios of 1.43, 1.34 and 1.21.</p> <p>According to the 2014 LEA Profile for the 2012-13 school year, the</p>

	discipline risk ratio for black students in the Highlands County School District was 8.10, compared to the state's discipline risk ratio of 2.49. This ratio of 8.10 was lower than the 2011-12 school year rate of 8.32 and the 2010-11 school year rate of 10.02, but overall, this school district's discipline risk ratios for black students have greatly exceeded the state risk ratios.
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	By <b>March 13, 2015</b> , the Highlands County School District will review current school and district policies related to student code of conduct to determine patterns of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions for black students. This review will include how suspensions and expulsions compare to other students in the school district. The results of this review will be submitted to BEESS no later than <b>March 31, 2015</b> .
<b>Status Update</b>	On March 31, 2015, the district provided BEESS documentation regarding a presentation the ESE director provided to all school principals on March 11, 2015, regarding their discipline numbers as compared to the racial population of their school (percentages), and a review of the district's manifestation checklist.  In addition, the district leadership team is reviewing school discipline data on a monthly basis. The district formed a work group for a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) Tier 3 redesign in collaboration with positive behavioral interventions and support. The district also formed a discipline committee to review suspensions and discipline issues.
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process</b>	
Summary	During the monitoring and assistance on-site visit, there was a consensus that the Highlands County School District will ensure that all data systems used in the school district for students with disabilities are able to provide valid and reliable data for use in successful problem-solving and planning activities related to student outcomes.  In addition to this selected priority, the school district must continue their action planning and problem solving in regard to the graduation rate, dropout rate and discipline.  Pursuant to s. 1003.57, F.S., once every three years, each school district and school shall complete a BPIE assessment with a FIN facilitator and include the results of the BPIE assessment and all planned short-term and long-term improvement efforts in the school district's SP&P. The BPIE is an internal assessment process designed to facilitate the analysis, implementation and improvement of inclusive educational practices at the district and school team levels. The Highlands County School District completed the BPIE on October 29, 2014.
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	The Highlands County School District must choose one or more

	<p>evidence-based practices to increase the standard diploma graduation rate, and decrease the dropout rate and discipline risk ratios for the school district and for students who are black.</p> <p>Additional action planning and problem solving for the school district in regard to graduation rate, dropout rate and discipline will be scheduled by the SST liaison identified during the on-site visit and the Highlands County School District's director of Student Support Services. The results of the BPIE must be incorporated into this process.</p> <p>By <b>March 31, 2015</b>, the Highlands County School District will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan(s) and determine additional next steps, as appropriate. The results of that evaluation must be reported by the school district to BEESS by <b>April 13, 2015</b>.</p>
<p><b>Status Update</b></p>	<p>On April 14, 2015, the district provided BEESS with documentation regarding evaluating the effectiveness of the district action plan and additional next steps, which included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district continues to implement Check &amp; Connect at the secondary schools.</li> <li>• School-level BPIEs are being completed.</li> <li>• An EWS is in place.</li> <li>• Discipline data are being reviewed monthly by the district leadership team.</li> <li>• The district is reviewing its participation in positive behavioral interventions and support in order to strengthen the MTSS and Tier 3 practices.</li> <li>• The district transitioned to utilizing the PEER IEP. Staff was trained in August 2015 and all annual or initial IEPs after this training were developed in PEER.</li> </ul>

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

The following data are related to the focus areas and activities for the 2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance for Highlands County School District.

**Graduation Rate**

The federal uniform high school graduation rate for students with disabilities is calculated by taking the number of first-time ninth graders from four years ago, plus the number of incoming transfer students on the same schedule to graduate, minus the number of 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 graduation rate for students with disabilities has remained below the state rate for the past three years.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Highlands	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>
State	<b>47.7%</b>	<b>52.3%</b>	<b>55.1%</b>	<b>56.8%</b>

**Dropout Rate**

The federal dropout rate for students with disabilities is calculated by taking the number of students who exited special education as a result of 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 federal dropout rate for students with disabilities has exceeded the state rate for the past four years.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Highlands	<b>29.1%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>
State	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>

**Discipline Rate and Risk Ratio (4B)**

Discipline rates for students with disabilities and nondisabled students are calculated by dividing the number of students who received out-of-school suspensions or expulsions totaling more than 10 days, by the total-year enrollment as reported at the end of the school year (survey 5). The risk ratio is calculated by dividing the discipline rate of students with disabilities by the discipline rate of nondisabled students. A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that students with disabilities and nondisabled students are equally likely to be suspended or expelled. The following chart indicates that for the 2014-15 school year, students with disabilities in the district whose race is black are **7.69** times more likely to be suspended or expelled than all nondisabled students.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Highlands	<b>8.32</b>	<b>8.10</b>	<b>5.91</b>	<b>7.69</b>
State	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>2.72</b>

**Incidents of Seclusion**

According to the school district’s 2014-17 SP&P document, Crisis Prevention Institute/ Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (CPI/NCI) training is used to train staff members on the use of restraint and seclusion. CPI/NCI training is required for principals, assistant principals, deans, and selected ESE teachers and ESE paraprofessionals and is offered each year in August prior to the start of school. The plan for reducing the need for the use of seclusion is to reduce the percentage of seclusions overall by 25 percent.

According to the FDOE’s restraint and seclusion database, the number of incidents of seclusion in the district has increased since the 2013-14 school year. In addition, the total percentage of students with disabilities secluded in the district for the 2014-15 school year is **0.68** percent, while the state average is **0.21** percent.

	2012-13 (August – July)	2013-14 (August – July)	2014-15 (August – July)
Number of Incidents*	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>
Number of Students	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>

\*Average incidents of seclusion for 2014-15 size-alike districts is **24**.

Seclusion data for August 1, 2015, through January 31, 2016, indicated there was an increase of 16 incidents of seclusion with 16 more students being secluded, for an incident percentage rate increase of 80 percent compared to this same time frame in the 2014-15 school year.

**Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)**

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with nondisabled students. These LRE data are calculated by dividing the number of students with disabilities aged 6 through 21 served in the regular class for 80 percent or more of the day, by the total number of students with disabilities aged 6 through 21 reported in October (survey 2). These data do not include parentally placed private school students or students served in Florida county jails, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice facilities or Florida Department of Corrections. The district’s percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class was below the state rate in the 2014-15 school year. Subsequent to the on-site visit, BEESS received the 2015-16 LRE data indicating that the percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular classrooms is now above the state rate.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Highlands	<b>67.1%</b>	<b>66.8%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>74.1%</b>
State	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>71.3%</b>	<b>74.4%</b>	<b>73.0%</b>

**Transition Individual Educational Plans Aligned with Postsecondary Outcomes**

Each year districts are required to complete web-based protocols on the BEESS General Supervision website. Correction of noncompliance and corrective action plans are reported by districts and tracked via the website. One of the required protocols is SPP 13 – Secondary Transition for Students with Disabilities (Age 16). This protocol is comprised of 16 standards. The last standard (T16-16) includes all the requirements for a transition IEP to be compliant.

During the 2013-14 self-assessment process, 50 percent of the student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16, and during the 2014-15 self-assessment process, 33 percent of the student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16. Results of the 2015-16 self-assessment indicate that 83 percent of student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16, which is a significant increase.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Percentage of Noncompliance for Standard T16-6	<b>50%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>83.3%</b>

**Interviews Conducted**

**Administrator Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted interviews with administrative staff members from Avon Park High School, Sebring High School, Hill-Gustat Middle School and Memorial Elementary School regarding the graduation rate, the dropout rate, LRE, discipline (4B) and incidents of seclusion.

Themes that emerged from the administrator focus groups included the following:

- In an effort to reduce the dropout rate, one school has implemented processes and practices that include attendance review committees, an EWS, support facilitation and consultation services provided by teachers, and progress monitoring of student attendance and grades.
- Implemented supports and interventions that ensure students graduate include mentoring programs (i.e., Check & Connect and College Bound Male), credit recovery, inclusive scheduling, resource mapping, after-school tutoring and daily study hall.
- Actions taken by the school to reduce the number of in-school suspensions (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS) include counseling with students instead of processing a referral, providing students with a quiet place to reflect, working with students privately to develop a de-escalation plan, increasing parent conferences with deans and team leaders, using Pinnacle as a tracking system to monitor student grades, providing students with the opportunities to work on class assignments during ISS.
- The current discipline approach involves looking for the source of a problem in order to resolve issues rather than dispensing referrals for ISS or OSS. One school assigned an administrator to track ISS and OSS data and to disaggregate indicator 4B data for analysis, which is received on a regular basis from the district. These changes have resulted in a decrease in the number of ISS and OSS referrals.
- The general education setting has raised the bar for students with disabilities as they are rising to meet the challenges and are being successful.
- Student behavior improved when students were placed in inclusive settings.
- Seclusion data are monitored weekly by the district and disseminated to the schools.
- The school-based staff participated in de-escalation training to decrease incidents of seclusion.
- Scheduling of students with disabilities within the general education classroom appears to remain a challenge across the district to ensure students' needs are being met.

### **Teacher Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted interviews with teachers from Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School, Sebring High School, Hill-Gustat Middle School and Memorial Elementary School regarding the graduation rate, the dropout rate, LRE, discipline (4B) and incidents of seclusion.

Themes that emerged from the teacher focus groups included the following:

- In order to address the needs of students with disabilities who are at risk of not graduating, there is a need for more supports for incoming freshman, including the ability of teachers to access student information, professional development in differentiated instruction and a parent advocate or liaison at the schools to assist parents.
- The Student At-Risk Committee meets monthly to review graduation data. Graduation coaches are paired with students who are at risk for not graduating.
- There is an active mentoring program where local speakers are invited to come and share their stories.
- In an effort to reduce OSS, mentors are provided to the students who are at risk; inclusion support is provided in the classrooms and the deans provide support to all students. In addition, many of the teachers volunteer to be mentors.
- Inclusion has been challenging because the teachers must deal with students on multiple levels of academic functioning. A master schedule was developed but not followed.
- In order to address challenges with inclusion, there is a need for professional development



on differentiated instruction, universal design of instruction and accommodations.

- The students with disabilities who take classes in the inclusive setting are rising to meet expectations.
- Overall, the support facilitation model is working well; however, there is a need for more teachers to provide support in the classroom, smaller class sizes and opportunities for planning. There needs to be a more evenly disbursement of students with disabilities throughout the general education classrooms. Support facilitation teachers have to work with 10 teachers in different content areas.  
Concern was expressed for students when a disciplinary infraction results in ISS for one class, which results in the student being in ISS for the whole day, thus missing all classes.
- There is no opposition to students making up work when in ISS or OSS and there is the belief that a student's academic progress was hindered when not allowed to make up their work.

### **Student Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted student focus groups at Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School, Sebring High School and Hill-Gustat Middle School. The students were asked to share their perspectives on topics such as support from teachers, post-school goals, assistance received to prepare for life after high school, causes of dropout, disciplinary issues and additional resources or services needed.

Comments from the students included the following:

- Various school staff had spoken with the students regarding their goals after high school.
- Students attended their IEP team meetings and reported that their teachers discussed their progress toward their IEP annual goals and testing accommodations.
- Most code of conduct violations were related to dress code and cell phones that resulted in ISS. The students shared that they had to request their work when in ISS, and would only receive partial credit for their completed work.
- ISS should be used as a last resort and many of the same students are referred to ISS over and over. Counseling should be offered to students instead of ISS.
- Students were able to identify individuals at school and at home that they feel comfortable talking with regarding dropping out of school. If the students were having problems and considering dropping out, school-based staff members that the students felt comfortable talking to included coaches, guidance counselors and school resource officers.
- Many students enjoyed the inclusion model, which provides extra assistance if needed. Students are able to connect and establish a relationship with at least one teacher if there is a personality conflict with the other teacher.
- Students love being included in the general education classroom. They are being challenged academically and feel they are a part of the school social environment.

### **School Walk-Through Debriefings**

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School, Sebring High School, Hill-Gustat Middle School and Memorial Elementary School.

Observations from the school walk-through debriefings included the following:

- The classrooms were clean, attractive, well maintained, and inviting and included motivational visuals.
- Classroom environments were positive and students were actively engaged in the learning process.

- Classrooms were structured and organized with age- and subject-appropriate materials.
- Teachers and students were utilizing technology effectively, including SMART boards and computers.

A seclusion room was checked at Memorial Elementary School and there was chipped paint at the door. Before leaving the school, this information was brought to the principal's attention who indicated that it will be fixed.

### Commendations

1. Parent involvement (SPP Indicator 8) is the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. The 2013-14 parent survey rate for kindergarten through Grade 12 was 79 percent, while the state rate was 76 percent.
2. The district's LRE rate for students with disabilities increased from 64.3 percent in 2014-15 to 74.1 percent for the 2015-16 school year.

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

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	
Summary	The district's graduation rate of 35 percent for the 2013-14 school year was below the state rate of 55.1 percent and for the 2014-15 school year, the district's graduation rate was 25.4 percent, while the state rate was 56.8 percent.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue to monitor, on a monthly basis, all student grades, attendance issues and discipline referrals to ensure that the students stay on track for graduation. In addition, the district should continue to work closely with Project 10 to increase the graduation rate and postsecondary outcomes.
Required Actions	<p>The district is required to compile and monitor data quarterly for at-risk students to ensure that students are on track to graduate. In addition, the district must engage in problem-solving activities and determine what strategies to use for students who are not on track to graduate.</p> <p>The quarterly data and a summary on problem-solving activities must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison by the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>September 16, 2016</b></li> <li>• <b>December 16, 2016</b></li> <li>• <b>March 17, 2017</b></li> </ul>
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	
Summary	The district's dropout rate of 22.2 percent was above the state rate of 19.2 percent for the 2013-14 school year. For the 2014-15 school year, the district's dropout rate was 22.6 percent, which continued to be above the state rate of 18.7 percent.

Recommendations	It is recommended that the district follow through with planned actions through PS:Rtl, SPDG and Project 10 to implement strategies to decrease the district dropout rate.
Required Actions	See the required actions for the graduation rate.
<b>Educational Environment (LRE)</b>	
Summary	The district's LRE rate for students with disabilities was 66.8 percent in 2013-14, while the state rate was 71.3 percent. In 2014-15, the district's LRE rate was 64.3 percent, while the state rate was 74.4 percent. Recent data from the 2015-16 school year indicate the district's LRE rate is 74.1 percent, which exceeds the state rate of 73.0 percent.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue with the implementation of the BPIE Action Plan and continue collaboration with FIN, Technology and Learning Connections for Assistive Technology, and FDLRS in creating professional development opportunities for implementation of universal design for learning and differentiated instruction to allow for additional inclusion model classrooms in the district for the 2016-17 school year.
Required Actions	None
<b>Discipline – 4B</b>	
Summary	The district's 4B risk ratio has exceeded the state rate for the past four years. For the 2013-14 school year, the district's 4B risk ratio was 5.91, while the state rate was 2.92. In the 2014-15 school year the district's 4B risk ratio increased to 7.69, while the state rate was 2.72.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue to collaborate with the Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (known as SEDNET) regarding facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk students and students with an emotional behavioral disability and their families.
Required Actions	The district must compile and review 4B data quarterly and provide BEESS with a summary of the problem-solving activities that resulted from this review. In addition, the district must participate in the statewide PBIS Disproportionality Workgroup.  The quarterly 4B data and the summary of problem-solving activities must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison by the following dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>September 16, 2016</b></li> <li>• <b>December 16, 2016</b></li> <li>• <b>March 17, 2017</b></li> </ul>
<b>Incidents of Seclusion</b>	
Summary	The district has increased the number of incidents of seclusion since the 2013-14 school year. The total percentage of students with disabilities secluded in the district for the 2014-15 school year

	was <b>0.68</b> percent, while the state average was <b>0.21</b> percent.
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	<p>The district must:</p> <p>Compile and review seclusion data on a monthly basis and engage in problem-solving activities that result from this review.</p> <p>The seclusion data reviews and summaries of the related problem-solving activities must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison by the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>September 16, 2016</b> (July 1- August 31)</li> <li>• <b>December 16, 2016</b> (September 1- November 30)</li> <li>• <b>March 17, 2017</b> (December 1- February 28)</li> </ul> <p>In addition, if the 2016-17 first-quarter seclusion data indicate an increase of 25 percent compared to the 2015-16 first-quarter seclusion data, the district may be required to participate in the PBIS Seclusion Workgroup.</p>
<b>Transitions on IEP</b>	
Summary	The district's rate of findings of noncompliance for transition on IEPs (standard T16-16), was 50 percent in the 2013-14 school year, with a decrease to 33 percent in the 2014-15 school year. In the 2015-16 school year there was a significant increase to 83.3 percent of noncompliance for standard T16-16.
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	The district is required to participate in training by Project 10 regarding transition on IEPs no later than <b>September 1, 2016</b> . The district's ESE specialists for transition are required to attend this training. Documentation of the training, staff attendance and the agenda must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison no later than <b>September 16, 2016</b> .
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process</b>	
Summary	No later than <b>January 20, 2017</b> , the SST, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan and determine additional next steps, as appropriate, via a scheduled telephone call. The district will provide documentation to be discussed to the district's BEESS liaison prior to the scheduled call.

## Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support 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](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 of 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 and
  - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations** that catalog state laws and regulations related to school discipline.
5. **Functional Behavioral Assessment and Positive Intervention Benchmarks of Effective Practice** (Florida's PBIS Project) may be accessed at [http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/pbs\\_FBA\\_Benchmarks.pdf](http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/pbs_FBA_Benchmarks.pdf).
6. **PS:Rtl Technology** 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.

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