

**2016-17 Exceptional Student Education  
On-Site Monitoring Report**

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**Highlands County School District  
February 22-24, 2017**



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## Table of Contents

Authority.....	1
Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring Process.....	1
Background Information.....	1
School Selection.....	2
On-Site Activities.....	3
On-Site Visit Team .....	3
Data Collection .....	3
Status Update for the 2015-16 On-Site Monitoring Visit .....	4
2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring Results .....	8
Graduation Rate .....	8
Dropout Rate .....	8
Discipline – 4A.....	9
Discipline – 4B.....	9
Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment) .....	9
Transition Individual Educational Plans Aligned with Postsecondary Outcomes .....	10
Incidents of Seclusion.....	10
Interviews Conducted.....	11
Administrator Focus Groups .....	11
Teacher Focus Groups.....	12
Parent Focus Group .....	12
Student Focus Groups.....	12
School Walk-Through Debriefings .....	13
Commendations.....	13
2016-17 Next Steps .....	13
Technical Assistance .....	18
State Support Team for Highlands County School District .....	21

## **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, the 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 Process**

### **Background Information**

The 2016-17 ESE Monitoring 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 more 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 rates of suspensions and expulsions of more 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 process includes four phases:

- Phase 1 is composed of planning activities that occur in advance of the initial 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).
- Phase 3 is follow-up 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 how the district is addressing each of the focus areas, and should include participation of the action-planning and problem-solving process team.

In a letter dated September 19, 2016, 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 4A, discipline 4B, least restrictive environment (LRE), transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes, and incidents of seclusion. Prior to the on-site visit, the district requested that prekindergarten (PreK) classes at an elementary school be included for behavioral concerns.

### **School Selection**

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

- Memorial Elementary School
- Sun 'N Lake Elementary School

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

## **On-Site Activities**

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

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

#### **FDOE, BEESS**

- Monica Verra-Tirado, State Director for Special Education, Bureau Chief
- Diana McLendon, Program Specialist, Instructional Support Services (ISS), Lead
- Amanda Register, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring
- Susan Riley, Program Specialist, ISS

#### **Peer Monitor**

- Melody Sommers, ESE Director, Okaloosa County School District

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

- Carly Detlefsen, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network, Project 10
- Franklin Coker, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10
- Lisa Yount, Regional Coordinator, Problem-Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Tracy Dasher, Project Manager, Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET)
- Kathleen Mathis, Coordinator, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Stephanie Moreo, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Robyn Vanover, Specialist, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: Multi-Tiered System of Support (PBIS:MTSS)
- Lael Engstrom, Project Director for Check & Connect, State Program of Developmental Grants (SPDG)
- Tina Harmon, Coordinator, Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD)
- Mindy Stevens, Director, CARD
- Sandy Smith, Director, Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)
- Debbi Nicolosi, Director, TATS
- Heidi Hyche, Director, Keiser University Multidisciplinary Center (KUMC)
- Rita Ellis, Instructional Specialist, KUMC
- Cheyney Cushing, School Liaison, KUMC

## **Data Collection**

On-site monitoring activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session with district and school administrators and staff – 38 participants
- Administrator focus groups – 36 participants

- Teacher and support staff focus groups – 35 participants
- Parent focus group – six participants
- Student focus groups – 33 participants
- School walk-through debriefings – 28 classrooms
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 18 participants

The district completed the initial Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with FIN facilitators on December 8, 2014. The BPIE was updated on September 2, 2016, and on April 7, 2017, and the district amended the three goals below:

- Goal 1: To build capacity within the district, the district ESE team will increase knowledge of best practices for inclusive education and to be able to support classroom teachers.
- Goal 2: By the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, the district will increase their percentage on educational environment from 64 to 70 percent for students with disabilities spending 80 percent or more of their week, with nondisabled peers. The district will decrease their percentage from 22 to 19 percent for students with disabilities spending less than 40 percent of their week with nondisabled peers. During the 2017-18 school year, additional schools will utilize the Flexible Scheduling process to improve their LRE percentages, which will result in a districtwide improvement for LRE percentages.
- Goal 3: After participating in the flexible scheduling process and collaborative teaching professional development, schools will sustain or increase their present continuum of services so that the number of students with disabilities in regular class placement will increase by three percent during the 2015-16 school year.

The district and the staff of FIN plan to complete the district's triennial BPIE by October 2017.

### **Status Update for the 2015-16 On-Site Monitoring Visit**

The following information is taken from the **2015-16 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>Graduation Rate</b>	
Summary	The district's graduation rate of 35.0 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, which is below the state rate of 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 staff to increase the graduation rate and postsecondary outcomes.
Required Actions	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>The quarterly data and a summary of 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>Status Update</b>	<p>On September 12, 2016, the district provided BEESS with quarterly data for at-risk students to ensure that students were on track to graduate. In addition, on September 7, 2016, the district met with staff of Project 10 to review the color-coded charts for the 2014-15 cohort.</p> <p>On December 16, 2016, the district provided BEESS with quarterly data for at-risk students to ensure that students were on track to graduate. In addition, the district provided evidence of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project 10 staff met with the district on September 28, 2016, and developed an agenda for an Interagency Council meeting scheduled for January 9, 2017, for administrators, counselors and ESE teachers.</li> <li>• District staff met with staff from the Institute for Small and Rural Districts and KUMC on December 13, 2016, to discuss the Interagency Council's plans.</li> </ul> <p>On March 7, 2017, the district provided BEESS with quarterly data for at-risk students to ensure that students were on track to graduate. In addition, the following documentation was provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projection of graduation rates for the three high schools and an overall projected district graduation rate.</li> <li>• List of high school graduation coaches that are working with students to stay on track for graduation.</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 with staff members from 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>Status Update</b>	The district's 2015-16 federal dropout rate improved from 18.7 to 11.7 percent, which is below the state target of 13.4 percent.
<b>Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)</b>	
Summary	The district's LRE rate for regular class placement for students with disabilities was 66.8 percent in 2013-14, which is below the state rate of 71.3 percent. In 2014-15, the district's LRE rate for regular class placement was 64.3 percent, which is below the state rate of 74.4 percent. Recent data from the 2015-16 school year indicated the district's LRE rate for regular class placement was 74.1 percent,

	which is above the state rate of 73.0 percent.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue with the implementation of the BPIE and continue collaboration with staff members from 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.
Status Update	The district's LRE rate for regular class placement increased from 74.1 to 75.4 percent during the 2016-17 school year.
<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 SEDNET staff regarding facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk students and students with an emotional behavioral disability and their families.
Required Actions	<p>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.</p> <p>The quarterly 4B data and the summary of 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>
Status Update	<p>On September 12, 2016, the district provided BEESS with quarterly 4B data and the following documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A summary of the 4B discipline data and an analysis based on the review of the data.</li> <li>• Verification of participation in the statewide PBIS Disproportionality Workgroup.</li> </ul> <p>On December 16, 2016, the district provided BEESS with quarterly 4B data and a summary of the problem-solving activities that resulted from this review.</p> <p>On March 7, 2017, the district provided BEESS with quarterly 4B data and a summary of the problem-solving activities that resulted from this review.</p>

<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 0.68 percent, while the state average was 0.21 percent.
Recommendations	N/A
Required Actions	<p>The district must compile and review seclusion data on a monthly basis and engage in problem-solving activities that result from this review. 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 or more compared to the 2015-16 first-quarter seclusion data, the district may be required to participate in the PBIS Seclusion Workgroup.</p>
<b>Status Update</b>	<p>The district provided BEESS with documentation of their monthly review of seclusion data and the problem-solving activities that resulted from this review on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• September 12, 2016</li> <li>• December 16, 2016</li> <li>• March 7, 2017</li> </ul> <p>The seclusion data for the district indicates that the use of seclusion decreased throughout the 2016-17 school year.</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 staff regarding writing transition goals 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>Status Update</b>	On September 12, 2016, the district provided BEESS with documentation stating that Project 10 staff was scheduled to provide Quality IEP Training on September 28, 2016. Documentation of the training, staff attendance and agenda was provided to BEESS after the training occurred. In addition, during the 2016-17 self assessment, 100

	percent of the district's transition IEP records submitted were compliant.
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process</b>	
<b>Summary</b>	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 with the district's BEESS liaison prior to the scheduled call.
<b>Status Update</b>	On February 2, 2017, the district shared with BEESS staff and the applicable SST members how they are addressing each of the targeted areas. Documentation was provided prior to the scheduled conference call.

### 2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring Results

The following data are related to the focus areas and activities for the 2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring for the 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 graduation rate for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year was 25.4 percent, which is below the state target of 56.3 percent. The 2015-16 graduation rate increased to 39.3 percent, which is below the state target of 58.3 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Highlands	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>39.3%</b>
State Target	<b>54.3%</b>	<b>56.3%</b>	<b>58.3%</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 dropout rate for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year was 22.6 percent, which is above the state target of 15.1 percent. The 2015-16 dropout rate decreased to 11.7 percent, which is below the state target of 13.4 percent.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Highlands	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>
State Target	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>

**Discipline – 4A**

Discipline indicator 4A identifies the risk of students with disabilities being suspended or expelled for more than 10 days as compared to their nondisabled peers. A risk ratio of 2.0 would mean that students with disabilities are twice as likely to be suspended or expelled for more than 10 days compared to their nondisabled peers. The district’s risk ratio for 4A for the 2014-15 school year was 3.04 percent. The district’s risk ratio for 4A for the 2015-16 school year increased to 3.54 percent, which means that when compared to nondisabled students, students with disabilities in the district are 3.54 times more likely to be suspended or expelled for more than 10 days. Florida has set the risk ratio threshold at 3.0; therefore, rates above 3.0 are considered significantly disproportionate.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Highlands	<b>2.23</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>3.54</b>
State Risk Ratio	<b>1.43</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>1.17</b>

**Discipline – 4B**

Discipline risk ratios for students with disabilities are calculated by first dividing the number of students with disabilities from a specific racial or ethnic group who received out-of-school suspensions (OSSs) or expulsions totaling more than 10 days, by the total-year enrollment of students with disabilities from the same racial or ethnic group. Second, the number of all nondisabled students who received OSSs or expulsions totaling more than 10 days is divided by the total number of nondisabled students. The risk ratio is calculated by dividing the result of the first step by the result of the second step. A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that students with disabilities of a given race are no more likely to be suspended or expelled than all nondisabled students. The district’s risk ratio for 4B for the 2014-15 school year was 7.69 percent. The district’s risk ratio for 4B for the 2015-16 school year decreased to 6.81 percent, which means that students with disabilities in the district whose race is black were 6.81 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than all nondisabled students. Florida has set the risk ratio threshold at 3.0; therefore, rates above 3.0 are considered significantly disproportionate.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Highlands	<b>5.91</b>	<b>7.69</b>	<b>6.81</b>
State Risk Ratio	<b>2.92</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>2.45</b>

**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 for the 2015-16 school year was 74.1 percent, which is below the state target of 79 percent. The district's LRE rate for regular class for the 2016-17 school year increased to 75.4 percent, which is below the state target of 82 percent.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Highlands	<b>64.3 %</b>	<b>74.1%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>
State Target	<b>77.0%</b>	<b>79.0%</b>	<b>82.0%</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), which is comprised of 19 standards. Standard (T16-16) includes all the requirements for a transition IEP to be compliant.

During the 2014-15 self-assessment process, 33.3 percent of the student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16. Results of the 2015-16 self-assessment process indicated that 83.3 percent of student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16. Results of the 2016-17 self assessment indicated that there were no findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Percentage of Noncompliance for Standard T16-16	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>

**Incidents of Seclusion**

According to the FDOE's restraint and seclusion database, the number of incidents of seclusion in the district increased from 44 in the 2014-15 school year to 59 in the 2015-16 school year. In addition, the total percentage of students with disabilities secluded in the district for the 2015-16 school year is 1.44 percent, while the state average is 0.17 percent.

According to the school district's 2015-18 SP&P document, the district's annual goal for the 2015-16 school year was to reduce the number of incidents of seclusion by 10 percent. During the 2015-16 school year the number of incidents of seclusion increased from 44 to 59. The district did not meet this goal.

Seclusion data for August 1 through December 31, 2015, includes 31 incidents of seclusion involving 10 students. Seclusion data for August 1 through December 31, 2016, includes 27 incidents of seclusion involving 10 students in the district. These data indicate that the district's use of seclusion decreased for the first half of the 2016-17 school year.

	2013-14 (August – July)	2014-15 (August – July)	2015-16 (August – July)	2016-17 (August – December)
Number of Incidents	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>27</b>
Number of Students	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>

## Interviews Conducted

### Administrator Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with administrators from Memorial Elementary School, Sun 'N Lake Elementary School, Sebring Middle School, Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School and Sebring High School regarding graduation rate, dropout rate, discipline 4A, discipline 4B, LRE, incidents of seclusion and PreK behavioral concerns.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Most schools visited are including students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
- High schools are utilizing an early warning system (EWS) to track students for graduation.
- Mentoring programs such as Check & Connect are having positive outcomes for students.
- There is concern for Check & Connect ending at the end of the school year because of a loss of funding.
- The district has established alternatives for disciplinary procedures (e.g., service work).
- The district provides a variety of instructional supports that promote student achievement, inclusion and graduation through supplemental resources and programs based on student need and data (e.g., Advancement via Individual Determination [AVID]).
- The use of AVID at the high schools has contributed to positive student outcomes.
- Additional professional development opportunities are needed for teachers at every school level:
  - PreK (e.g., curriculum and behavior intervention plans)
  - All other schools (e.g., Crisis Prevention Intervention, trauma-informed care, positive behavior interventions and Restorative Justice)
- Additional support is needed at some schools for migrant students (i.e., community liaisons to assist with language and cultural gaps).
- More opportunities are needed to involve and engage parents.
- There is concern for teacher retention for qualified ESE teachers.
- More academic support is needed for ninth grade students.
- Behavior plans are not being implemented for PreK students with behavioral needs.
- Administrators assist teachers when PreK students become disruptive by allowing students to be removed from the classroom.
- There is difficulty in retaining PreK teachers because of student behaviors in the classroom.

## **Teacher Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with teachers and one support staff member from Memorial Elementary School, Sun 'N Lake Elementary School, Sebring Middle School, Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School and Sebring High School regarding graduation rate, dropout rate, discipline 4A, discipline 4B, LRE, incidents of seclusion and PreK behavioral concerns.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Teachers feel supported by school administrators.
- Additional support is needed at some schools for migrant students (i.e., community liaisons to assist with language and cultural gaps).
- Teachers indicated that students have strong self-advocacy skills.
- There is a need to continue meaningful articulation meetings in order to improve communication between middle school and high school staff.
- Teachers indicated that best practices for teaching skills and behaviors for academic success from the AVID program would benefit students at all school levels.
- There is a need for more ESE inclusion teachers and to ensure teachers are qualified in their content area.
- There is a need for more professional development for new teachers and paraprofessionals.
- The use of an EWS and Check & Connect has been implemented at the high schools.
- Administrators are supportive and provide instructional supplies as needed for PreK classrooms.
- PreK teachers indicated that additional support and guidance for student behavior within the classroom was needed.
- General education and ESE teachers are working together on inclusion; however, having a common planning time would strengthen instruction and increase student achievement.

## **Parent Focus Group**

Members of the SST conducted a focus group with parents of students with disabilities aged 14 years or older from the district regarding postsecondary transition.

Themes that emerged from the focus group included the following:

- Faculty is supportive and teachers are responsive to students' needs.
- Parents actively participate in IEP team meetings.
- Parents communicate with teachers and work through concerns directly with the school.
- Parents are aware of transitional supports for students (e.g., agencies and resources).
- Parents feel they have respect for teachers and their workload.
- Training is needed for general education teachers regarding accommodations and how to effectively communicate with the students about their accommodations.

## **Student Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with students from Sebring Middle School, Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School and Sebring High School. Students were asked to share their perspectives on topics such as graduation, dropout and post-school activities.

Comments from these focus groups included the following:

- Students mentioned mentorship (Check & Connect) as a successful support.
- Students feel supported by their teachers.
- Teachers and counselors are accessible when needed.
- Students are knowledgeable of their IEPs and goals.
- Assistance is needed with postsecondary plans and how to follow through with those plans.
- In-school suspension and out-of-school suspension are not beneficial for most students as they do not decrease inappropriate behaviors.
- Students report difficulty with math and the amount of testing.

**School Walk-Through Debriefings**

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at Memorial Elementary School, Sun 'N Lake Elementary School, Sebring Middle School, Avon Park High School, Lake Placid High School and Sebring High School regarding student engagement, school climate, and evidence of academic and behavioral expectations.

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

- Student behavioral expectations are clearly visible and posted throughout schools with the exception of one middle school.
- There is mutual respect in the schools among teacher, staff and students.
- Students were engaged during small- and whole-group instruction and on task during independent seat work.
- Use of computers and assistive technology is present in all school settings.
- Celebration of student achievement was displayed around the schools.
- Teachers provided positive, reinforcing feedback.
- PreK classrooms are lacking centers that include manipulatives, furniture, wall displays and technology.

**Commendations**

1. The 2015-16 dropout rate decreased from 22.6 percent for the 2014-15 school year to 11.7 percent, which is below the state target of 13.4 percent.
2. The district's findings of noncompliance for transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes (standard T16-16) was 83.3 percent in the 2015-16 self assessment and decreased to zero percent in the 2016-17 self assessment.

**2016-17 Next Steps**

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	
Summary	The graduation rate for students with disabilities increased from 25.4 percent in the 2014-15 school year to 39.3 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is below the state target of 58.3 percent.
Recommendations	The district should continue implementation of Check & Connect with secondary ESE students. In addition, the district should ensure that teachers and administrators are aware of the discretionary projects and

	the professional development offered by these projects to help students graduate on time.
Required Actions	<p>The district must continue collaboration with Project 10 staff to provide professional development on the early warning color-coded system to all applicable high school staff, district ESE specialists, the MTSS Core Team and graduation coaches who serve the high schools. Following the training, each high school must identify which staff member will be the designee for the implementation process at each school.</p> <p>The following documentation must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> as evidence of implementation of the required trainings and the school designee by <b>September 8, 2017</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of the materials used in the trainings.</li> <li>• A copy of the sign-in sheets for each training, which includes participants' names, titles and school names.</li> <li>• The name and title of each school-level designee who will be responsible for overseeing the early warning color-coding system.</li> </ul> <p>The district must develop interventions and activities for struggling students and provide documentation of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of interventions and activities for struggling students</li> <li>• The name and title of the school-level designee who will be responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions and activities are made available to students.</li> </ul> <p>This documentation must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>November 1, 2017</b></li> <li>• <b>February 1, 2018</b></li> </ul>
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	
Summary	The district's dropout rate decreased from 22.6 percent in the 2014-15 school year to 11.7 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is below the state target of 13.4 percent.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue to monitor and track dropout data.
Required Actions	None.
<b>Discipline – 4A</b>	
Summary	The district's risk ratio for 4A for the 2014-15 school year was 3.04, which indicates that when compared to nondisabled students, students with disabilities in the district were 3.04 times more likely to be suspended or expelled for more than 10 days. The district's risk ratio for 4A for the 2015-16 school year increased to 3.54, which is above the state threshold of 3.00.
Recommendations	The district should review the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) guidance on supporting behavior of students with disabilities with school principals and ESE staff, and monitoring discipline of students with disabilities. This guidance can be accessed at

	<a href="https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/dcl-on-pbis-in-ieps--0801-2016.pdf">https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/dcl-on-pbis-in-ieps--0801-2016.pdf</a> .
Required Action	<p>The district must complete the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review its policies, practices and procedures related to discipline of students with disabilities and identify and address one policy, practice or procedure that is contributing to significant disproportionality. Guidance on this process can be found at <a href="https://toolkits.ideadata.org">https://toolkits.ideadata.org</a>.</li> <li>Continue participation in the PBIS Disproportionality Work Group and use the Indicator 4A and 4B Equity Profile to collect and analyze discipline data by disability category and ethnicity.</li> </ul> <p>The district must provide a detailed narrative of the above-mentioned actions to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by <b>August 17, 2017</b>.</p>
<b>Discipline – 4B</b>	
Summary	The district's 4B risk ratio has exceeded the state threshold of 3.00 for the past five years. For the 2014-15 school year, the district's 4B risk ratio was 7.69 and decreased to 6.81 in the 2015-16 school year.
Recommendations	<p>The district should consider the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review OSEP's guidance on preventing racial discrimination in special education with school principals and ESE staff, which can be accessed at <a href="https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201612-racedisc-special-education.pdf">https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201612-racedisc-special-education.pdf</a>.</li> <li>Utilize the IDEA Success Gaps Toolkit, which can be accessed at <a href="https://toolkits.ideadata.org">https://toolkits.ideadata.org</a>, to address issues of equity, inclusion and opportunity.</li> <li>Integrate restorative practices into discipline policies and procedures.</li> </ul>
Required Action	<p>The district must continue to participate in the PBIS Disproportionality Work Group. The district must provide quarterly 4B discipline data and engage in data-based problem solving focusing on reducing the significant discrepancy in discipline.</p> <p>The quarterly 4B discipline data and a summary of the problem-solving activities must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>August 17, 2017</b></li> <li><b>November 1, 2017</b></li> <li><b>February 1, 2018</b></li> </ul>
<b>Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)</b>	
Summary	The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class for the 2015-16 school year increased to 74.1 percent, which is below the state target of 79.0 percent. The district's LRE rate for regular class for the 2016-17 school year increased to 75.4 percent, which is below the state target of 82.0 percent.

Recommendations	The district should continue to provide professional development on the value of inclusive education, and on effective models of support facilitation and co-teaching. In addition, the district should continue to monitor and track data through problem solving with the district leadership team and should update the BPIE goals to align with the current needs within the district.
Required Actions	None.
<b>Incidents of Seclusion</b>	
Summary	Seclusion data for August 1 through December 31, 2015, includes 31 incidents of seclusion involving 10 students. Seclusion data for August 1 through December 31, 2016, includes 27 incidents of seclusion involving 10 students in the district. These data indicate that the district's use of seclusion decreased for the first half of the 2016-17 school year.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the FDOE's Technical Assistance Paper, DPS 2011-165: "Guidelines for the Use, Documentation, Reporting, and Monitoring of Restraint and Seclusion with Students with Disabilities," which can be accessed at <a href="https://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6212/dps-2011-165.pdf">https://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6212/dps-2011-165.pdf</a>.</li> <li>Review practices to identify potential areas of improvement and misalignment with district policies and procedures to establish a clear understanding and appropriate use of seclusion.</li> <li>Continue to collaborate with staff from PBIS and SEDNET on strategies to decrease the number of incidents of seclusion.</li> </ul>
Required Actions	The district must review the seclusion data quarterly and engage in data-based problem solving focusing on reducing the need for seclusion.  The quarterly seclusion data and the summary of the problem-solving activities must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by the following dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>August 17, 2017</b></li> <li><b>November 1, 2017</b></li> <li><b>February 1, 2018</b></li> </ul>
<b>Transitions on IEP</b>	
Summary	The district's findings of noncompliance for transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes (standard T16-16) was 83.3 percent in the 2015-16 school year. The district's findings of noncompliance for transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes (standard T16-16) decreased to zero percent in the 2016-17 school year.
Recommendations	Prior to the submission of student records for self assessment, the district should continue to review the IEPs for compliance for transition goals and ensure that postsecondary outcomes (SPP 13) are included. If noncompliance is found, the district should continue to provide training to staff responsible for the noncompliance.

Required Actions	None.
<b>Prekindergarten Classrooms for Behavioral Concerns</b>	
Summary	Prior to the on-site visit, the district requested that PreK classes at an elementary school be included in the on-site visit for behavioral concerns.
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that the district consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the classroom arrangement and instructional activities are developmentally appropriate and aligned to the standards and students' IEPs with accommodations and scaffolding as needed. PreK classrooms should be designed to include a variety of centers, such as library, writing, manipulatives, floor play, dramatic play, blocks, science and math.</li> <li>• Ensure that visuals are displayed and used for communicating the daily schedule, routines, transitions, classroom rules and student needs.</li> <li>• Ensure that direct instruction and visuals are provided to support and teach appropriate behaviors, identify emotions, and support the development of relationships in the classroom.</li> <li>• Continue collaboration with staff from TATS for professional development, coaching and mentoring.</li> </ul>
Required Action	None.
<b>Phase 4 of the ESE On-Site Monitoring Process</b>	
Summary	<p>The Highlands County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas related to students with disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation rate</li> <li>• Dropout rate</li> <li>• Discipline 4A</li> <li>• Discipline 4B</li> <li>• Least restrictive environment</li> <li>• Incidents of seclusion</li> <li>• Transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes</li> </ul>
Required Actions	<p>By <b>November 8, 2017</b>, and <b>February 15, 2018</b>, designated BEESS staff and members of the district problem-solving team will reconvene via a conference call to share how they are addressing each of the above-mentioned focus areas and determine next steps. The district will coordinate with BEESS regarding the date and time of the conference call and provide documentation (e.g., recent data, professional development, problem-solving notes and action plans) via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by <b>November 1, 2017</b> (for the November 8th call) and <b>February 7, 2018</b> (for the February 15th call).</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](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 FDOE. The school district's document for the 2015-16 through 2017-18 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 <https://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. **IDEA Success Gaps Toolkit** may be accessed at <https://toolkits.ideadata.org>. The Success Gaps materials were developed to assist a school or district to conduct a root cause analysis and make a plan for reducing success gaps. Districts can use the tools to take a closer look at their educational system to prevent "success gaps" and ensure equitable education for all students. A state can use the materials with a district to identify success gaps and their causes within the LEA. Some states will use the materials as part of their work with districts that are underperforming academically, have school climate challenges or have identified disproportionality.
6. **Dear Colleague Letter: Preventing Racial Discrimination in Special Education** may be accessed at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201612-racedisc->

[special-education.pdf](#). The Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education issued the Dear Colleague Letter on Preventing Racial Discrimination in Special Education on December 12, 2016, to help ensure that all students, regardless of race, color, or national origin, have equitable access to high-quality general and special education instruction.

7. **Dear Colleague Letter: Supporting Behavior of Students with Disabilities** may be accessed at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/dcl-on-pbis-in-ieps--08-01-2016.pdf>. On August 1, 2016, OSEP provided guidance for schools to clarify their responsibility under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* to provide children with disabilities appropriate behavioral interventions and supports that are necessary to ensure they have meaningful access to their education. Failure to make behavioral supports available throughout a continuum of placements, including in a regular education setting, could result in an inappropriately restrictive placement and constitute a denial of placement in the LRE.
8. **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.
9. **FDLRS Associate Centers Support** may be accessed at <http://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 are 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.
10. **PS:RtI Technology** may be accessed at <http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>. One function of this project provides support to regional technology coordinators and technology specialists 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.

11. **SEDNET** may be accessed at <http://www.sednetfl.info/>. The 19 regional SEDNET centers assist Florida school districts and relevant stakeholders in building capacity to provide the necessary mental health and academic supports to students with or at risk of emotional and behavioral disabilities to prepare students to achieve academic success; graduate high school; and become career, college and life ready.
  
12. The **PS/Rtl – Technology and Learning Connections** (TLC) may be accessed at <http://www.tlc-mtss.com>. TLC provides guidelines and resources to support the implementation of universal design for learning. A quarterly newsletter that focuses on technology integration to support the local development of highly effective classrooms for all students may also be accessed. TLC's Winter 2016-17 newsletter focuses on math instruction, resources and tools to eliminate barriers and increase achievement for all students and can be viewed at <http://conta.cc/2kjsuGt>. To sign-up to receive this quarterly newsletter, please visit <http://bit.ly/1TL0HLQ>. Additional resources are available at <http://www.tlc-mtss.com/resources.html>.

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