

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

**Holmes County School District
October 20-22, 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.fl DOE.org/e se/mon-home.asp>. For information on available resources, contact the BEESS Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

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December 18, 2015

Eddie Dixon, Superintendent
Holmes County School District
701 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Bonifay, Florida 32425-2349

Dear Superintendent Dixon:

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 Holmes 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 February 11-12, 2015. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, local educational agency profiles, and an action-planning and problem-solving process.

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

The 2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process focuses on those State Performance Plan indicators that contributed to the targeting of school districts for coordinated early intervening services and those indicators that affect equity and access in the educational environment for students with disabilities. Additionally, the process focuses on a shift from ESE compliance to outcomes to prepare all students for college, career and life readiness, which include increasing standard diploma graduates, decreasing the number of students dropping out of school, increasing regular class placement, decreasing the need for seclusion and restraint, and eliminating disproportionality in eligibility identification and discipline.

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

Superintendent Dixon
December 18, 2015
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Ms. Donnita Butorac, Director of ESE, and her staff were very helpful to the SST in preparing for the on-site visit and throughout the visit. In addition, 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/ease/mon-home.asp>.

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

Sincerely,

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

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

Enclosure

cc: Donnita Butorac
Heidi Metcalf
Laurie Epps
Karin Gerold

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**2015-16 Exceptional Student Education
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Authority

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), in carrying out its roles of leadership, resource allocation, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation, is required to oversee the performance of district school boards in the enforcement of all ESE laws (sections 1001.03(3), 1003.571 and 1008.32, Florida Statutes [F.S.]) and rules. One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (s. 300.1(d) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]). BEESS is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of IDEA and the educational requirements of the state are implemented (34 CFR §300.149(a)(1) and (2)).

In fulfilling this requirement, BEESS monitors ESE programs provided by district school boards in accordance with ss.1001.42, 1003.57 and 1003.573, F.S. Through these monitoring activities, 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, was created in July 2010 and established documentation, reporting and monitoring requirements for districts regarding the use of restraint and seclusion for students with disabilities. School districts were required to have policies and procedures that govern parent notification, incident reporting, data collection and monitoring of the use of restraint or seclusion for students with disabilities in place no later than January 31, 2011. In July 2011, s. 1003.573, F.S., was amended to require that the FDOE establish standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual or physical restraint and occurrences of seclusion. In September and October 2011, the standards established by the FDOE were provided to school districts and were included in the district's ESE Policies and Procedures document.

Exceptional Student Education Monitoring and Assistance Process

Background Information

The 2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance process focuses on those state performance plan indicators that contributed to the targeting of school districts for CEIS and the following indicators that affect equity and access in the educational environment for students with disabilities:

- Indicator 1 – Graduation: Percentage of youth with individual educational plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma.
- Indicator 2 – Dropout: Percentage of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.
- Indicator 4 – Rates of suspension and expulsion:
 - A. Percentage of districts that have a significant discrepancy in the rates of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs.
 - B. Percentage of districts that have (a) a significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days for children with IEPs; and (b) policies, procedures or practices that contribute to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and support, and procedural safeguards.
- Indicator 5 – Educational environments:
Percentage of children with IEPs aged 6 through 21:
 - A. Inside the regular class 80 percent or more of the day
 - B. Inside the regular class less than 40 percent of the day and
 - C. In separate schools, residential facilities or homebound/hospital placements.
- Indicator 10 – Disproportionality, specific disability categories: Percentage of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification.
- CEIS – Services provided to students in Kindergarten (K) through Grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in K through Grade 3) who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment.
- Restraint – Rate of incidents of restraint, as reported on the FDOE website.
- Seclusion – Rate of incidents of seclusion, as reported on the FDOE website.

The ESE Monitoring and Assistance process includes the following four phases:

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

In a letter dated September 14, 2015, the Superintendent of the Holmes County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: graduation rates, dropout rates and least restrictive environment (LRE).

School Selection

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

- Ponce De Leon Elementary School
- Ponce De Leon High School and
- Holmes County High School.

On-Site Activities

On-Site Visit Team

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

FDOE, BEESS

- Laurie Epps, Program Specialist, Instructional Support Services, BEESS lead
- Karin Gerold, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring

FDOE, Bureau Discretionary Projects

- Ann Selland, Problem-Solving Facilitator, Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Tury Lewis, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network
- Faye Yonge, Program Coordinator, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Caren Prichard, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Greg Gillman, State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)

Data Collection

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- School-level administrator focus group – 8 participants
- Teacher focus group – 17 participants
- School walk-through debriefing – 9 classrooms visited
- Student focus groups – 13 participants
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 20 participants.

Discretionary project staff members working with the district provided the following information prior to the 2015-16 on-site visit:

- FDLRS had conducted numerous trainings and support for the district and had frequent contact with the district to assess professional development needs.
- FIN was invited to the district in August 2015 to assist in the district's initiative to implement the inclusion model of teaching in several schools. FIN met frequently with teachers and district staff, and will continue to follow-up and support the district with the current implementation of the inclusion model for the 2015-16 school year, as well as expansion of

the teaching model for the 2016-17 school year.

- SPDG held informational meetings with the district regarding Check and Connect. The district will be working with SPDG to implement the program at targeted schools as identified by the ESE director.

The district completed the Best Practices for Inclusive Education assessment with FIN facilitators on June 5, 2014. Data were collected regarding leadership and decision-making, instruction and student achievement, and communication and collaboration indicators. An initial FIN services plan was developed on July 10, 2014, and included the following goals relevant to the 2015-16 on-site monitoring visit:

- FIN and Holmes County District Staff will conduct professional development and technical assistance activities with schools regarding the flexible scheduling process and inclusive practices resulting in an increase of students with disabilities in the general education classes from 62 percent to 79 percent by June 2016.
- FIN and district staff will provide direct support in implementation of inclusive practices to targeted schools by June 2016 in order to improve reading from 26 percent to 50 percent proficient and math from 25 percent to 50 percent proficient.

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

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

Graduation Rates

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

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Holmes	45.7%	60.0%	36.4%
State	47.7%	52.3%	55.1%

Dropout Rates

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

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Holmes	22.2%	17.9%	28.6%
State	21.1%	20.3%	19.2%

Educational Environment

LRE: The number of students with disabilities ages 6 through 21 served in the regular class for 80 percent or more of the day, divided by the total number of students with disabilities ages 6 through 21 reported in October (Survey 2). The data do not include parentally placed private school students or students served in the Florida county jails, in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice facilities or in the Florida Department of Corrections. The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class is **below** the state rate.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Holmes	67.4%	67.6%	62.1%
State	70.7%	71.3%	74.4%

Interviews Conducted

Student Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted student focus groups at Ponce De Leon High School and Holmes County High School. Interview topics included: career and technical education, college preparation, academic experiences, participation in extracurricular activities, accommodations, IEP and IEP team meetings and other resources or services needed.

Comments from the students included the following:
Ponce De Leon High School

1. Most students indicated that their parents talked to them about goals after high school. They indicated that information was provided in the IEP team meeting about goals after high school. No students indicated that information was provided directly from the school.
2. College and career fairs were held at the schools.
3. Students at one school indicated that they liked the block scheduling days, but indicated that it kept them from taking some of the vocational education classes offered within the district.
4. All students reported participating in their IEP team meetings and found it to be helpful.
5. The students reported that they have not considered dropping out of school.
6. Students reported that the teachers knew them individually and seemed to care about them. Students felt comfortable talking to teachers. Teachers helped them in class and were preparing them for college, technical school or a job.
7. Students reported that they were included in general education classes. The students indicated that the change to the inclusion model was different from last year and was more difficult, but they believed they were getting adequate support.
8. Students reported that they received accommodations, but felt that more time, assistance with note-taking, having information read to them and additional explanations would help them be successful with their courses.
9. Students indicated that their learning strategies classes were too big. When asked, they reported that the classes had eight to ten students.
10. Students reported that they were able to use their personal phones in addition to available computers to assist with learning, as access to technology was limited.

Teacher Focus Groups

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

- Holmes County High School
- Ponce De Leon Elementary School
- Ponce De Leon High School

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

1. Participants indicated that the inclusion model was new, but they had already witnessed the benefits for all students in the inclusion classrooms. Both the district as well as school administration were supportive of the inclusion model.
2. Participants expressed that they would like to expand the inclusion model, but indicated that some barriers included lack of staff, common planning time between the general education and ESE teachers, scheduling issues and lack of knowledge on strategies and methods to help meet the needs of all students in inclusion classes.
3. Students were provided instruction to prepare for the ACT, as well as remediation and credit recovery programs.
4. Collaboration occurred between general education and ESE teachers to ensure that accommodations, modifications and support were provided.
5. Participants expressed a need for more technology and professional development on assistive technology to use for students with disabilities. They indicated that professional development in writing strategies, differentiated instruction and accessible instructional materials was also needed.
6. Participants reported that there was a need for expanded transition options for students 18-22 years old.

Administrator Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups included administrators from the following schools:

- Holmes County High School
- Ponce De Leon Elementary School
- Ponce De Leon High School

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

1. Participants indicated that teachers had embraced the inclusion model and were working toward what was best for the students. FIN was assisting schools with collaborative teaching models.
2. There was a need to expand the inclusion model, but barriers were lack of staff and training.
3. Participants were monitoring student progress; however, there was not a universal early warning system used in the district.
4. Participants indicated that students received mental health counseling services from an agency contracted by the district, but expressed that they were interested in additional supports from discretionary projects.
5. Lack of transportation was a barrier for some students to access district-wide programs such as the Graduation Assistance Program and after school programs.
6. Participants reported that there was a need for access to and use of technology, including professional development for teachers for the use of existing technology.
7. Participants suggested more collaboration with agencies regarding career and vocational training programs.

School Walk-Through Debriefing

A school walk-through was conducted at all schools in the classrooms of teachers who participated in the focus groups. A total of nine classrooms were visited. The following best practices were noted during the walk-through visits:

- Students and teachers were engaged in the learning process.
- Students in the general education inclusion classroom at the elementary school used white boards with dry erase markers. Computers were being used in the self-contained classroom. Other technology was either not present or not being utilized at the time of the walk-throughs.
- The physical environments in the classrooms were orderly and conducive to learning.
- In the elementary school, the inclusion model was observed during a math class and students worked in peer groups during independent practice.
- In the high schools, students were observed discussing lesson points.
- Support facilitation was observed during a science class in one of the high schools.
- Goals and benchmarks were displayed in the classrooms at the elementary and high school classrooms visited.

Commendations

1. The district had collaborated with FIN at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year to implement inclusion model in several classrooms throughout the district.
2. The district began a collaboration with SPDG to implement Check and Connect, a research-based intervention program for drop-out prevention, in several schools in the district.
3. Schools had begun to implement systems for monitoring both student progress for graduation, meeting and reviewing data on a frequent basis and providing interventions when needed.

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

As part of the monitoring and assistance on-site visit, the SST members, ESE director and representatives from the Holmes County School District participated in an action-planning and problem-solving process. The group reviewed the data collected and selected dropout rate as the priority goal. In addition, a list of resources and barriers were determined and the group elected to address attendance first. An action plan was developed that included the following strategies:

- Early Warning System (EWS)
- Professional Development
- Check and Connect
- FIN:
 - Inclusion
 - Differentiated instruction
 - UDL
- Teacher buy in
- Technology and Learning UDL
- Time management
- Funding for substitutes

As follow-up to the action plan, staff from Project 10, PS:Rtl and SPDG are planning to train administration at an upcoming principal's meeting on the implementation of EWS strategies and Check and Connect. Project staff is working with the district's ESE director on possible dates to provide the training.

Next Steps	
Graduation Rates	
Summary:	<p>Based on the 2013-14 school year data, the district's Federal uniform graduation rate was significantly lower than any other size-alike district and the state average.</p> <p>The district had made an inquiry with SPDG about the Check and Connect program to help assist with increasing graduation rates.</p>
Recommendations:	It is recommended that the Holmes County School District work with SPDG and Project 10 to implement Check and Connect and other programs with schools identified by the ESE director.
Dropout Rates	
Summary:	Based on the 2013-14 school year data, the district's Federal dropout rate was significantly higher than any other size-alike district and the state average.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that the Holmes County School District implement an EWS in all schools. Such a system will provide a means to identify students who need additional support to improve academic performance and stay engaged in school.
Required Action:	<p>The Holmes County School District shall follow through with planned actions through PS:Rtl, SPDG and Project 10 to implement an EWS and strategies to decrease the district dropout rate.</p> <p>By September 30, 2016, the district is to provide their BEESS liaison, Karlene Deware, with an update on the progress with implementation of the EWS.</p>
Educational Environment – LRE	
Summary:	<p>Based on the 2014-15 school year data, the regular class placement data were lower than any other size-alike district and the state average.</p> <p>In August 2015, the Holmes County School District sought assistance from FIN, who has been working with several schools in the district regarding the implementation of the inclusion model of teaching and follow-up support and assistance. The district calculated LRE data from August through October 2015 and indicated that the inclusion rate was 72 percent.</p>

<p>Recommendation:</p>	<p>It is recommended that the Holmes County School District continue to work with FIN, Technology and Learning Connections for Assistive Technology, FDLRS and the Local Assistive Technology specialists in developing professional development opportunities for implementation of differentiated instruction to allow for additional inclusion model classrooms in the district for the 2016-17 school year.</p>
<p>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance Process</p>	
<p>Summary:</p>	<p>By September 30, 2016, the ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan(s) and determine additional next steps, as appropriate. Please provide this evaluation to your BEESS liaison, Karlene Deware.</p>

Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Behavior: Recommended Practices for School and District Leaders** (Florida's PBS Project) may be accessed at http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/RTIB%20Guide%20101811_final.pdf and provides an overview of the critical components of an MTSS for behavior. These critical components describe systems changes that are necessary for a results-driven ESE system.
2. The district's **SP&P** document provides district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual, physical or mechanical restraint and seclusion developed by the FDOE. The school district's document for the 2013-14 through 2015-16 school years may be accessed at <http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx>.
3. The technical assistance paper entitled **Guidelines for the Use, Documentation, Reporting, and Monitoring of Restraint and Seclusion with Students with Disabilities**, dated October 14, 2011, may be accessed at <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6212/dps-2011-165.pdf>. This document provides guidance regarding the use, documenting, reporting and monitoring of restraint and seclusion with students with disabilities in school districts, including (a) when restraint or seclusion might be used, (b) considerations when selecting a training program for restraint, (c) what should be documented, (d) parent notification and reporting, and (e) monitoring use. It also contains information about s. 1003.573, F.S., Use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities.
4. The United States Department of Education, in collaboration with the United States Department of Justice, released **School Discipline Guidance** in January 2014, **Volume 4, Issue 1 of the Office of Special Education Programs Monthly Update**. This package will assist states, districts and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate, and ensure those policies and practices comply with federal law. The following resource documents are included in the package, and 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 catalogue state laws and regulations related to school discipline.
5. **The Project 10: Transition Education Network** (<http://project10.info>) assists Florida school districts and relevant stakeholders in building capacity to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve their academic success and post-school outcomes. Project 10 serves as the primary conduit between BEESS and school district personnel in addressing law and policy, effective practices, and research-based interventions in the area of transition services for youth with disabilities. The project also supports transition initiatives developed through the BEESS Strategic Plan.
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 with support to effectively implement accessible instructional materials, assistive technologies, learning technologies, and UDL principles within all tiers of instruction. This project also manages, coordinates and supports the regional assistive technology loan libraries.

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

2015-16 ESE Monitoring and Assistance

State Support Team for Holmes County School District

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

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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

ACT	American College Test
BEESS	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
CEIS	Coordinated early intervening services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ESE	Exceptional student education
EWS	Early warning system
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
FDLRS	Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Associate Centers
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
K	Kindergarten
LEA	Local educational agency
LRE	Least restrictive environment
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of support
PS:RtI	Problem Solving: Response to Intervention
SPDG	State Personnel Development Grant
SST	State Support Team
UDL	Universal Design for Learning



Pam Stewart, Commissioner
313217A