

**2018-19 Exceptional Student Education
On-Site Monitoring Report**

**Okaloosa County School District
February 5-6, 2019**



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

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Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
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Authority

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), 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 1003.01(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]). BEES 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, BEES 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, BEES 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.

ESE On-Site Monitoring Process

Background Information

On January 25, 2019, in response to the superintendent's request to provide guidance to the district's ESE department regarding their responsibilities as an LEA, the Commissioner of Education requested that the bureau conduct an on-site visit to Okaloosa County School District.

School Selection

It was determined that the on-site monitoring process would include focus groups with school administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, the school behavioral teams and parents at the following schools:

- Kenwood Elementary School
- Silver Sands Center School

2018-19 ESE On-Site Monitoring Focus Areas

Refer to the district LEA Profile, located at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/data/>, which was shared with the district leadership team at the welcome meeting on day one of the on-site monitoring visit.

Interviews Conducted

Administrator Focus Groups

Members of the BEES leadership team conducted focus groups with administrators from Kenwood Elementary School and Silver Sands Center School.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Administrators conduct frequent walkthroughs to ensure quality instruction and provision of accommodations to students.
- Administrators are trained in the district's crisis management system, Quality Behavioral Solutions (QBS), and some are members of the school safety team.
- Administrators make it a point to know their students and their individual needs.
- There is a need for support allocations, differentiated by student programs, such as a full-time behavior specialist assigned to the school; additional support from the speech-language pathologist (SLP) to support students in communication, behavioral and socialization classes; a school counselor at the center school; and a social worker and mental health specialist are also needed.
- Instructional support and coaching for access courses is needed, including academic coaches.
- There is a need for professional development and ongoing coaching for behavioral and instructional strategies for students with significant cognitive disabilities and behavioral needs.
- There is a concern that a paraprofessional position, which had been added to assist with in-school suspensions, was not provided.

Teacher Focus Groups

Members of the BEESS leadership team conducted focus groups with teachers from Kenwood Elementary School and Silver Sands Center School.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Some teachers reported being trained on QBS, and all agreed that QBS does not address the needs of younger students.
- There is a need for professional development and support for instructional strategies for students enrolled in access courses.
- There is a need for additional training in behavioral strategies for students with severe behavioral needs.
- A full-time behavior specialist is needed to assist with implementation and support for behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) as the current behavioral specialist is assigned to consultation because of large caseloads.
- Professional development is needed for bus drivers who transport students with behavioral needs.
- There is a need for general education teachers to be trained in an inclusion model that supports students with disabilities, as well as the need for a full continuum of support for inclusion.
- More training is needed for preventative measures regarding behaviors for students with significant behavioral needs.
- One teacher at Kenwood Elementary School expressed concerns with class size numbers.

Paraprofessional Focus Group

Members of the BEESS leadership team conducted a focus group with paraprofessionals who work in the classrooms of students with disabilities from Kenwood Elementary School and Silver Sands Center School.

Themes that emerged from the focus groups included the following:

- All paraprofessionals work directly for the teacher and all instructional activities are supervised by the teacher.
- A few of the paraprofessionals reported being QBS trained.
- Training is needed for social and emotional strategies; understanding individual educational plans (IEPs), BIPs and academic strategies; and knowledge regarding the types of disabilities of the students in the classrooms.
- There is a need for a full-time behavioral specialist to assist with coaching and implementing the BIPs.
- More training is needed to assist with preventative strategies for students with significant behavioral needs.
- There is a need for radios for all staff at Kenwood Elementary School because of safety.

School Behavioral Team Focus Groups

Members of the BEESS leadership team conducted focus groups with behavioral specialists, staffing specialists and school psychologists (itinerant staff) who were assigned to Kenwood Elementary School and Silver Sands Center School.

Themes that emerged from the focus group included the following:

- All itinerant staff reported being assigned to multiple schools.
- The roles of the itinerant staff are primarily in the development of the initial IEPs and the development of BIPs.
- The itinerant staff are unable to support teachers with implementation or follow-up because of large caseloads.
- There are concerns regarding the lack of time for follow-up, which contributes to an increased need for crisis management.
- Full-time behavioral specialists are needed at schools with special ESE programs.
- There is a need for mental health counselors for students in crisis.
- Training for inclusion and support for teachers and staff are needed.
- Clarity is needed regarding programs that are offered for students with disabilities at each school.
- A full continuum of services for inclusion is needed districtwide.
- Some itinerant staff indicated that when elementary school students in special programs transition to middle schools, some middle schools do not have similar special programs for those students.

Parent Focus Group

Members of the BEESS leadership team conducted a focus group with parents of students with disabilities from Kenwood Elementary School and Silver Sands Center School.

Comments from this focus group included the following:

- Parents have respect for current school administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals.
- There is a need for an extended school year program at Kenwood Elementary School.
- At Kenwood Elementary School, parents reported that their children feel isolated in portables and all agreed they would rather have their children located in the main building and forego the use of the portables' private bathrooms, which was a factor in the district's decision to place these students in portables.
- More training is needed for teachers and paraprofessionals regarding behavioral and

instructional strategies.

- Parents requested training on their child's behavioral plan in order to provide support and follow-up at home.
- The continuum of services from elementary to middle school is lacking.
- There are concerns regarding using substitute teachers and their lack of training to support students in the classroom.
- More information and awareness of the programs offered at each school is needed.
- Inclusion in the general education classroom is lacking at Kenwood Elementary School.

Commendations

1. The district's 2017-18 graduation rate for students with disabilities increased to 85.6 percent, which is above the state target of 62.3 percent.
2. The district's 2017-18 dropout rate for students with disabilities decreased to 7.1 percent, which is below the state target of 10.0 percent.
3. Silver Sands Center School created an outside partnership with Karen Erikson and the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies to assist with instruction for students with significant disabilities.

2019-20 Next Steps

Recommendations for Additional Training
<p>It is recommended that the district collaborate with BEESS discretionary projects on strategies and professional development training for staff for each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) and the district's newly formed ESE Parent Advisory Group to complete the tri-annual Best Practices for Inclusive Education prior to the beginning of the 2019-20 school year. • Continue focusing on social-skill instruction and de-escalation strategies to include the Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities' (SEDNET) training on trauma-informed care, the Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Project: Multi-tiered System of Supports' Behavioral Support Training, and the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities' (CARD) Behavioral Supports for Students with Autism. • Continue district collaboration with CARD and the Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism Teacher Partnership, the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS), and FDLRS-Multidisciplinary Educational Service Centers to provide professional development for teachers of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The professional development should include analysis of functions of severe problem behaviors and strategies for providing support for the students. • Consider utilizing CARD for the ASD Preventing Seclusion and Restraint for Students with ASD and the Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities (EBD) Moving From Crisis Management to Crisis Prevention for Students trainings. • Collaborate with SEDNET and CARD regarding facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk students and students with ASD, EBD and their families. • Collaborate with FDLRS and FIN for professional development, including inclusive scheduling training. • Train local school administrators in how to better use and verify data on educational settings for their students.

Recommendations for Staffing

It is recommended that the district collaborate with other similarly sized districts to identify best practices for structuring district- and school-level supports for all positions that provide services to students with disabilities, such as the following:

- Teacher-to-student ratios at center schools.
- Additional supports (e.g., full-time behavioral specialist, SLP, social worker and board-certified behavioral analyst) for students enrolled in special programs at cluster school sites.
- Consideration of caseloads and specific job descriptions assigned to behavioral specialists and staffing specialists to ensure implementation and follow-up activities regarding BIPs and behavioral goals in IEPs.
- Consideration of a designated staff member at each school site to monitor timelines for IEPs and schedule the meetings rather than teachers.
- Provision of additional ESE-certified teachers to offer support to students with disabilities served in general education settings.
- Review district staff to ensure there is adequate specialized support for school leaders and teachers.

Recommendations for Clarity of ESE Programs

For additional clarity of ESE programs for students with disabilities, the district should consider the following recommendations:

- Outline the articulation processes for the transition of students from elementary to middle and from middle to high school, including a variety of placement options and supports available to students in general education settings.
- Provide clarity to staff and parents regarding specific ESE programs available for students with disabilities.

Recommendations for Instructional Support

For additional instructional support for students with disabilities enrolled in access courses, the district should consider the following recommendations:

- Collaborate with the Access Project to provide professional development and support to current instructional academic coaches and all teachers who provide instruction for students with disabilities enrolled in access courses.

Identify strategies to increase awareness of and participation in training for paraprofessionals for the following areas:

- Social and emotional strategies to address students' behavioral needs,
- The components of an IEP and BIP and the roles to implement both,
- Academic strategies to assist the teacher with instruction, and
- The types of disabilities of the students in the classrooms.

Recommendation: Follow up to the ESE Monitoring Visit

BEESS recommends a comprehensive ESE on-site monitoring visit to Okaloosa County School District in the fall of 2019, which will consist of the following four phases:

- Phase 1 is composed of planning activities that occur in advance of the on-site visit to the school district, which includes a review of current data for the selected focus areas.
- Phase 2 is the on-site monitoring visit to the school district by the state support team (SST). The SST consists of BEESS staff, peer monitors from other districts and discretionary project staff. The SST assists with facilitating focus groups at each school site that may consist of administrators, teachers, students and parents.

- Phase 3 are the district's follow-up activities to the on-site monitoring visit, which include district-selected actions based on feedback from the SST and required actions from the report.
- Phase 4 is evaluation of the effectiveness of how the district is addressing each of the focus areas and required actions included in the final report via a conference call with the SST, district staff and school principals who participated in the closing activities during the on-site monitoring visit.

Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Behavior: Recommended Practices for School and District Leaders** (Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Project: MTSS [FLPBIS:MTSS]) may be accessed at https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/RTIB_Guide_101811_final.pdf. FLPBIS:MTSS 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 **Exceptional Student Education 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 2015-16 through 2017-18 school years may be accessed at <http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx>.
3. The FDOE's technical assistance paper DPS: 2016-13, entitled, "**Least Restrictive Environment Considerations Related to Individual Educational Plans,**" dated January 15, 2016, may be accessed at <https://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-7540/dps-201613.pdf>. This document provides guidance on the provision of services for students with disabilities in the LRE.
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 are available at <http://www.ed.gov/school-discipline>:
 - **Dear Colleague** guidance letter on civil rights and discipline;
 - **Guiding Principles** document, which draws from emerging research and best practices;
 - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources**, which indexes federal technical assistance and other resources; and
 - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations**, which catalogs state laws and regulations related to school discipline.
5. The **Project 10: Transition Education Network** may be accessed at <http://project10.info>. Project 10 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 postsecondary 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, Project 10 supports dropout prevention strategies for students with disabilities, school-based enterprise, service learning and early warning system.

6. The **Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (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 and access points, differentiated instruction, access to the general curriculum, Strategic Instruction Model™, behavior and discipline, Standing up for Me, self-advocacy, responsive classroom, and district-specific supports. Professional development related to dropout include differentiated instruction, accommodations, Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success (known as CHAMPS), Tough Kids, discipline in the secondary classroom, support for parent involvement, Professional Development Alternatives for Positive Behavior Support module, universal design for learning, small-group planning and problem solving, disability awareness, and district-specific supports.
7. The **Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)** may be accessed at <http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com/>. FIN collaborates with all districts and schools to provide customized services and supports to ensure that students with disabilities have the same educational, social and future opportunities as their peers. In partnership with districts and schools, FIN facilitates implementation of best practices for inclusive education through data-driven, student-focused problem solving across districts and schools. In addition, FIN facilitates implementation of professional development and provides technical assistance and resources to district and school personnel in order to increase knowledge and skills to build and sustain capacity.
8. The **Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project (PS/Rtl) Technology** may be accessed at <http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>. One function of this project is to provide 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.
9. The **Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (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 college, career and life ready.
10. 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 focused 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, go to <http://bit.ly/1TLoHLQ>. Additional resources are available at <https://www.tlc-mtss.com/resources>.

11. The **Center for Autism and Related Disabilities** may be accessed at <http://florida-card.org>. The seven regional autism centers provide nonresidential resource and training services for persons of all ages and of all levels of intellectual functioning who have autism, a pervasive developmental disorder, an autistic-like disability, a dual sensory impairment, or a sensory impairment with other disabling conditions. Each center provides services within its geographical region of the state and service delivery is consistent for all centers and each center coordinates services within and between state and local agencies and school districts.
12. The **Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)** may be accessed at <https://tats.ucf.edu/>. TATS is a statewide system of technical assistance and training that promotes high-quality programs, which lead to and support positive outcomes for prekindergarten children with disabilities and their families.
13. The **State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)** project builds capacity to increase school completion rates of students with disabilities, through the provision of professional development to support and scale-up existing research-based practices, develop capacity for use of evidence-based dropout prevention strategies, and enlist parental support of these research based practices. These practices include Check & Connect (C&C) and the Strategic Instruction Model™ (SIM). C&C is a Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention used with secondary school students who show warning signs of disengagement with school and who are at risk of dropping out. At the core of C&C is a trusting relationship between the student and a trained mentor who both advocates and challenges the student to keep education salient. SIM is a literacy program centered on promoting effective teaching and learning of critical content in schools. Focusing on the Learning Strategies Curriculum and Content Enhancement Routines, SIM strives to help teachers make decisions about what is of greatest importance, what can be taught to help students become more effective learners, and how to teach so that all students, including students with disabilities, increase their proficiency in the Florida standards. SPDG does not have a website; however, if you have questions, contact Margaret Sullivan, director of SPDG, at msullivan@fgcu.edu.
14. The **FLPBIS:MTSS** may be accessed at <http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu>. Significant behavior problems contribute to unsafe school environments and to reductions in student performance; therefore, FLPBIS:MTSS is committed to building the capacity of school districts so that they may better assist schools to develop effective discipline, social skills teaching and behavior support strategies for all students.
15. The **Institute for Small and Rural Districts (ISRD)** may be accessed at <http://isrd.nefec.org/>. ISRD provides a forum for school district staff to keep abreast of a wide array of topics impacting the delivery of services to students with disabilities and their families, such as curriculum and instructional practices; educational policies, procedures and practices; behavior support; and transition. ISRD's primary purpose is to provide staff development, training and technical support to a network of 35 small and rural school districts, lab schools, the Florida Virtual School and the Department of Corrections. Overall, ISRD's goal is to ensure that service to students with disabilities and their families is enhanced and that positive outcomes for students with disabilities is achieved through increased student performance.

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