

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

**Sumter County School District
September 18-20, 2018**



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 (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 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]). 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 overidentified.

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 document.

ESE On-Site Monitoring Process

Background Information

The 2018-19 ESE On-Site 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 or 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 for 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 support to succeed in a general education environment.
- Restraint – Rate of incidents of restraint, as reported in the FDOE database.
- Seclusion – Rate of incidents of seclusion, as reported in the FDOE database.

The ESE On-Site 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). 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 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 August 13, 2018, the superintendent of the Sumter County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: dropout rate, least restrictive environment (LRE), CEIS related to discipline and transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes.

School Selection

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

- Bushnell Elementary School
- Wildwood Elementary School
- Wildwood Middle High School
- Sumter Prep Academy

2018-19 ESE On-Site Monitoring Focus Areas

The following data are related to the focus areas and activities for the 2018-19 ESE On-Site Monitoring for the Sumter County School District.

Dropout Rate

The 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, a special diploma, a certificate of completion, or a special certificate of completion, and who dropped out or died. The district's dropout rate for students with disabilities decreased from 14.3 percent during the 2015-16 school year to 13.4 percent during the 2016-17 school year. The 2017-18 dropout rate increased to 19.0 percent, which is above the state target of 10.0 percent.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Sumter	18.8%	14.3%	13.4%	19.0%
State Target	15.1%	13.4%	11.7%	10.0%

Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with students without disabilities. 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 increased from 75.5 percent during the 2015-16 school year to 76.4 percent during the 2016-17 school year. The 2017-18 LRE rate increased to 77.6 percent, which is below the state target of 83.0 percent.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Sumter	74.1%	75.5%	76.4%	77.6%
State Target	77.0%	79.0%	82.0%	83.0%

Coordinated Early Intervening Services – Discipline

Districts are required to set aside 15 percent of their IDEA funds for CEIS if incidents of removal through in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), or expulsion for students with disabilities of any given race are at least 3.5 times more likely to occur when compared to students with disabilities of all other races combined. The district's 2017-18 CEIS discipline data

indicated that the removal of black students with disabilities through ISS, OSS or expulsion was 3.83 times more likely to occur when compared to students with disabilities of all other races. The district's 2018-19 CEIS discipline risk ratio increased to 4.05. The district is required to withhold funds for CEIS because the district's 2018-19 risk ratio of 4.05 is above the state-identified threshold of 3.5.

Discipline Risk Ratio for Black Students with Disabilities

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18*	2018-19*
Risk Ratio	N/A	N/A	3.83	4.05

*District required to withhold funds.

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 2017-18 self-assessment process, 16.7 percent of the student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Percentage of Noncompliance for Standard T16-16	16.7%	0%	0%	16.7%

Interviews Conducted

Administrator Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with administrators from Bushnell Elementary School, Wildwood Elementary School, Wildwood Middle High School and Sumter Prep Academy regarding dropout, LRE, discipline and transition.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Administrators strive to build individual relationships with students.
- Data are used to make informed decisions and data chats are utilized on a regular basis with teachers.
- Most schools offer community support through tutoring, mentoring and work programs for students.
- Positive behavior interventions and supports are utilized in most schools.
- Professional development is needed for noninstructional staff such as bus drivers, paraprofessionals and other school staff for trauma-informed care and positive discipline strategies.

Teacher Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with teachers from Bushnell Elementary School, Wildwood Elementary School, Wildwood Middle High School and Sumter Prep Academy regarding dropout, LRE, discipline and transition.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Teachers feel that they are supported by the school and district administration.
- There is an emphasis on data-driven decisions at all schools.
- Teachers strive to build positive relationships with parents and students.
- Most teachers have high expectations for students.
- Additional staff is needed to accurately address student discipline and inclusion efforts.
- Most teachers are unaware of universal design for learning strategies.

Parent Focus Group

Members of the SST conducted a focus group with parents of students with disabilities aged 14 years or older.

Themes that emerged from this focus group included the following:

- Graduation requirements are discussed in annual IEP team meetings.
- Most schools provide information for postgraduation opportunities, but no information is received from Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Teachers are responsive to student needs.
- Access to Life Stream counseling is available if needed for students.
- Some parents indicated that additional support is needed for students to self-advocate for accommodations listed in the IEPs because not all teachers are aware of them.
- Schools are attempting to engage students and provide alternatives to decrease the number of disciplinary removals.

Student Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with students from Wildwood Middle High School and Sumter Prep Academy. Students were asked to share their perspectives on topics such as graduation, dropout and postsecondary activities.

Comments from these focus groups included the following:

- Students are aware of their IEPs and attended at least one IEP team meeting.
- Most students could identify a staff member at the school that they trusted and could speak to if they ever consider dropping out.
- Students are aware of the expectations and know the consequences if the rules are not followed.
- Some students reported an inconsistency of expectations from teachers based on the “neighborhoods” in which the students reside.
- Students indicated that all students with an IEP should have a mentor. Some students reported that they had applied for a mentor, but one had not been assigned yet.

Commendations

1. The federal cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities improved from 54.32 percent in 2014-15 to 70.5 percent in 2016-17.
2. The district has a strong data-driven staff that collaborates across departments to ensure data quality and consistent understanding of the data and its implications.

2018-19 Next Steps

Dropout Rate	
Summary	The district’s dropout rate for students with disabilities decreased from 18.8 percent during the 2014-15 school year to 14.3 percent during the 2015-16 school year. The 2016-17 dropout rate decreased to 13.4 percent, which is above the state target of 11.7 percent.
Recommendations	<p>The district should continue to collaborate with Project 10 staff to ensure implementation of the early warning system color coding and to provide professional development on identifying which students need interventions in order to graduate.</p> <p>The district should also continue to collaborate with Project 10 and Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl) staff to provide training to staff members at the school and the district level who are designated to help students graduate on time regarding the use of data to identify students who are at risk of dropping out or not graduating on time.</p>
Required Actions	None.
LRE	
Summary	The district’s percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class increased from 75.5 percent during the 2015-16 school year to 76.4 percent during the 2016-17 school year. The 2017-18 LRE rate increased to 77.6 percent, which is below the state target of 83.0 percent.
Recommendations	The district should continue to ensure that the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) Services Plan is implemented in the district and the schools.
Required Actions	<p>The district must complete the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The district must establish a process to ensure that all teachers have access to and are aware of students’ accommodations as listed in their IEPs. ● The district must collaborate with FIN and Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System project staff to select and prioritize schools that need additional training on inclusive scheduling and awareness training for students with disabilities. The training should include universal design for learning; differentiated instruction to allow for additional inclusion model classrooms (e.g., scheduling awareness training, co-teaching and support facilitation); and cooperative learning strategies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a timeline and process for the training to take place by the first day of school of the 2019-20 school year. <p>The district must provide a detailed narrative describing each of the above-mentioned actions to the district's BEESS liaison via BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org by March 13, 2019.</p>
CEIS Discipline	
Summary	The district's 2017-18 CEIS discipline data indicated that the removal of black students with disabilities through ISS, OSS or expulsion was 3.83 times more likely to occur when compared to students with disabilities of all other races. The district's 2018-19 CEIS discipline risk ratio increased to 4.05. The district is required to withhold funds for CEIS because the district's 2018-19 risk ratio of 4.05 is above the state-identified threshold of 3.5.
Recommendations	The district should consider positive discipline strategies with ongoing training for new staff, especially school-based leadership. The training should emphasize the ability for the teachers and staff to identify reasons for student behavior and recommend methods of support.
Required Actions	<p>As per project award notification for the IDEA Entitlement grant, the district must provide a midyear progress report and an end-of-year report. The reports must include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of progress toward achieving goals through implementation of the strategies described in the CEIS narrative. • Demonstration of progress toward achieving goals by submitting data, which should include computed disproportionality data from the beginning of the school year to the winter break. Year-to-year analysis of disproportionality data in the form of graphs or charts, which includes the current school year's data. • Evidence of implementation of the strategies, which may include summaries of professional development opportunities, hiring of personnel and resources purchased. • Description of how partnering with state discretionary projects has impacted implementation of strategies and progress toward achieving goals. • Details of obstacles encountered while implementing the plan and how they have or will be addressed. • Explanation of how efforts to reduce disproportionality in special education programs will be sustained when CEIS funds are no longer available. <p>The district must provide a detailed narrative describing each of the above-mentioned actions to the district's BEESS liaison via BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org by February 15 and June 3, 2019.</p>
Transition IEP	
Summary	During the 2017-18 self-assessment process, 16.7 percent of the student records entered by the district had findings of noncompliance for standard T16-16.
Recommendations	The district should continue to work to fulfill the corrective action plan

	that will be reviewed by the Dispute Resolution and Monitoring team in BEESS.
Required Actions	None.
Follow up to the ESE Monitoring Visit	
Summary	<p>The Sumter 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"> • Dropout rate • LRE • CEIS discipline • Transition IEPs aligned with postsecondary outcomes
Required Actions	<p>By August 29, 2019, the district will coordinate with BEESS regarding the date and time of the follow-up conference call and provide documentation (e.g., recent data, professional development, problem-solving notes and action plans) via BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org. The designated BEESS staff and members of the district problem-solving team will reconvene via this conference call to share how the district is addressing each of the above-mentioned focus areas and determine next steps by September 19, 2019.</p>

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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