

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

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**Taylor County School District  
January 19-21, 2016**



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/e/mon-home.asp>. For information on available resources, contact the BEES Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

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July 28, 2016

Paul E. Dyal, Superintendent  
Taylor County School District  
318 North Clark Street  
Perry, Florida 32347-2930

Dear Superintendent Dyal:

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 the Taylor 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 January 19-21, 2016. Those information sources included interviews with district and school staff, local educational agency profiles, and an action-planning and problem-solving process.

The Taylor County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas related to students with disabilities: graduation rates, dropout rates, discipline (4B), 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 Dyal  
July 28, 2016  
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Ms. Ramona Patrick, 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/ese/mon-home.asp>.

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

Sincerely,

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief  
BEESS

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monica Verra-Tirado". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Enclosure

cc: Ramona Patrick  
Heidi Metcalf  
Derek Hemenway

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**Taylor County School District**

**January 19-21, 2016**

**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, establishes documentation, reporting and monitoring requirements for districts regarding the use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities. It also requires districts to have policies and procedures in place that govern parent notification, incident reporting, data collection and monitoring the use of restraint or seclusion for students with disabilities. As required, FDOE has established district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of restraint and seclusion. These standards are included in each district's Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures document.

## ESE 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. 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 (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 four phases:

- Phase 1 is composed of planning activities that occurred in advance of the first on-site visit to the school district.
- Phase 2 is the initial on-site visit to the selected school district by the state support team (SST). **The initial on-site visit was December 12-13, 2013, and a second visit took place on January 21-22, 2015.**
- Phase 3 is follow-up and post-initial visit activities, which are conducted by a designated follow-up team, as determined by the SST, and identification of the ongoing data that will be collected.
- Phase 4 is evaluation of the effectiveness of the school district's action plan, and should include participation of the comprehensive team that was involved in Phase 1.

In a letter dated September 21, 2015, the superintendent of the Taylor County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: graduation rates, dropout rates, discipline (4B) 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 school walk-through debriefings:

- Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center
- Taylor County Elementary School
- Taylor County Middle School
- Taylor 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**

- Derek Hemenway, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring (BEESS lead)
- Judy White, Transition and Graduation Specialist, Instructional Support Services
- Heather Diamond, Project Coordinator, Student Support Services

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

- Beth Hardcastle, Problem-solving Facilitator, Florida's Problem Solving Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Martha Murray, Problem-solving Facilitator, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Eydie Tricquet, Director, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Kelly Claude, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Robin Petrick, Facilitator, FIN
- Greg Gillman, Project Facilitator, State Personnel Development Grant
- Tury Lewis, Regional Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network (P10)

### **Data Collection**

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session day one with district and school-level staff – 22 participants
- School-level administrator focus group – 20 participants
- Teacher focus group – 20 participants
- School walk-through debriefing – 12 classrooms
- Student focus groups – 15 participants
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 21 participants

The district completed the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with FIN facilitators on July 14, 2014, and a service plan was developed, which included the following goals:

- Goal 1: Taylor County ESE will disseminate a selection of job interview questions related to inclusion of diverse populations to school administrators for use by November 2014.
- Goal 2: FIN will support Taylor County ESE in decreasing the number of students receiving instruction in a separate class placement from 23 percent districtwide to 11 percent by May 2017 by providing strategies and information to teachers.

### Status Update for the 2014-15 ESE Monitoring and Assistance Visit

The following information is taken from the **2014-15 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>Restraint</b>	
Summary	The district's number of restraints decreased significantly from the 2013-14 school year. At the time of the 2014-15 visit, fewer than 10 restraints had occurred.
Recommendations	The district should continue to implement strategies to decrease the number of incidents of restraint in coordination with PBIS and the Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET).
Required Actions	None
<b>Status Update for 2014-15 Monitoring Visit</b>	FDLRS conducted multiple trainings including Crisis Prevention Institute's Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®, de-escalation during the 2014-15 school year. A subgroup of district leadership has been working with the PBIS project to address restraint and seclusion. In addition, SEDNET provided a full-day trauma informed care (TIC) training for district staff.  (See also additional items under Discipline (4B).
<b>Discipline – 4B</b>	
Summary	In 2013-14, the district's risk ratio was 4.67 for incidents of removal of black students with disabilities through suspension and expulsion for greater than 10 days in a school year. Although this risk ratio was a decrease from 8.00 in the prior year, it was a significant discrepancy (3.0 or higher).
Recommendations	The district should continue to make an effort to identify measures to decrease the number of discipline referrals and suspensions and expulsions and consider conducting focus groups with teachers, students and parents. The district's Positive Behavior Support team should continue to work on the goals established in the district's District Improvement Action Plan (DIAP), specifically, the district's goal to

<b>Next Steps</b>	
	enhance the implementation of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) via PBIS and behavior management training and further implementation of response to intervention – behavior (RtI-B) data analysis, and early warning system (EWS) data.
Required Actions	The District Action Planning and Problem Solving Process (DAPPS) team was scheduled to meet in May 2015 to discuss disproportionate discipline, PBIS implementation and restraint and seclusion. The district was to provide an update to BEESS no later than <b>July 1, 2015</b> .
<b>Status Update for 2014-15 Monitoring Visit</b>	The district submitted documentation on July 13, 2015, indicating that the DAPPS team met and discussed PBIS, restraint and seclusion, crisis management and prevention, TIC training, and discipline. On August 20, 2015, the district submitted documentation addressing DIAP action steps related to implementing an EWS, and specifically included a schedule of data collection. Additionally, on August 24, 2015, the district submitted a memorandum of understanding between the district and Florida's PBIS: MTSS project, which was signed on August 19, 2015.
<b>CEIS – Discipline</b>	
Summary	Fifteen percent of the IDEA Part B funds were to be used for students who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who are receiving additional behavioral supports in order to succeed in the general education curriculum. 2014-15 was the first year the district was required to set aside 15 percent of their IDEA funds for CEIS related to discipline. During 2015-16 the district will not be required to set aside 15 percent as the district's risk ratio for 2015-16 is 3.47.
Recommendations	The 2015-16 data for CEIS discipline for the district is 3.47, which is just under BEESS's definition of significant disproportionate representation of 3.5. It is recommended that the district continue efforts to decrease the risk ratio.
Required Actions	None
<b>Status Update for 2014-15 Monitoring Visit</b>	(See also additional items under Discipline – 4B.)
<b>Graduation</b>	
Summary	In 2011-12, the district's federal graduation rate for students with disabilities was 27.3 percent. In 2012-13, this increased to 35.7 percent. However, in 2013-14, the district's federal graduation rate decreased to 26.3 percent.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
Recommendations	<p>The district should continue to focus its efforts on implementation of the district's DIAP, particularly regarding activities related to improving graduation rates, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the Performance Matters EWS and the Check and Connect (C&amp;C) initiative</li> <li>• Implementation of activities identified in the district's BPIE with support from FIN</li> <li>• Development of transition plans using best practices and support from P10</li> <li>• Focusing on efforts to ensure graduation of current 12<sup>th</sup> graders and vertical articulation for eighth and ninth graders</li> </ul> <p>The district should also continue to implement an MTSS with fidelity with a goal of supporting students to proficiently master grade level standards.</p>
Required Actions	None
<b>Status Update for 2014-15 Monitoring Visit</b>	<p>P10 conducted trainings, including Life Centered Education, P10 mentoring, P10 transition assessment, <i>Standing Up for Me</i>, using data and summary of performance. Other support provided by P10 included technical assistance. In addition, the PS:Rtl project has participated in monthly meetings with district staff and collaborated with secondary administration to address graduation and dropout rates during the 2014-15 school year.</p> <p>(See also additional items under Discipline – 4B.)</p>
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process</b>	
Summary	By <b>March 31, 2016</b> , the SST, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the school district's progress or slippage in the areas of focus and determine additional next steps, as appropriate.
<b>Status Updates for 2014-15 and 2015-16 Monitoring Visits</b>	A telephone conference was held with SST members and the ESE director on March 28, 2016. Members reviewed the district's progress and recommended that the district continue its efforts and activities.

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

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

#### **Graduation Rates**

**Federal Uniform High School Graduation Rate for Students with Disabilities:** 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 graduation rate has been below the state rate for the past three years. In addition, the district's graduation rate for the 2013-14 school year decreased from the previous year. Subsequent to the on-site visit, BEESS received the 2014-15 federal graduation data,

which indicated that the district's graduation rate has increased to **43.3** percent; however, it is still below the state rate.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Taylor</b>	<b>27.3%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>26.3%</b>	<b>43.3%</b>
<b>State Rate</b>	<b>47.7%</b>	<b>52.3%</b>	<b>55.1%</b>	<b>56.8%</b>

### Dropout Rates

**Federal Dropout Rate for Students with Disabilities:** This calculation uses the number of students who exited special education as a result of dropping out, divided by the number of students who graduated with a regular high school diploma, special diploma, certificate of completion, special certificate of completion, dropped out or died. The district's federal dropout rate for students with disabilities has exceeded the state rate for the past three years. Subsequent to the on-site visit BEESS received the 2014-15 federal dropout data, which indicated that the district's dropout rate decreased to **7.7** percent and was below the state rate.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Taylor</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
<b>State Rate</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>

### Discipline Rates and Risk Ratios (4B)

Discipline rates for students with disabilities and nondisabled students are calculated by dividing the number of students who received out-of-school suspensions or expulsions totaling more than 10 days by total-year enrollment as reported at the end of the school year (survey 5). The risk ratio is calculated by dividing the discipline rate of students with disabilities by the discipline rate of nondisabled students. A risk ratio of 1.0 indicates that students with disabilities and nondisabled students are equally likely to be suspended or expelled. The following chart indicates that students with disabilities in Taylor County School District whose race is black are **4.63** times more likely to be suspended or expelled as all nondisabled students.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Taylor</b>	*	<b>8.00</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.63</b>
<b>State Rate</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>2.72</b>

\*Blank cells have less than 10 students with disabilities suspended/expelled for greater than 10 school days.

### Educational Environment

LRE: To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with students who are nondisabled. This calculation uses the number of students with disabilities aged 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 aged 6 through 21 reported in October (survey 2). The 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 2014-15 LRE rate for students with disabilities being served in the regular class was slightly below the state rate. However, subsequent to the visit, BEESS received the 2015-16 LRE data for regular classrooms, which indicates that the district's rate had increased and was now above the state rate.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Taylor</b>	<b>71.5%</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>72.5%</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>State Rate</b>	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>71.3%</b>	<b>74.4%</b>	<b>73%</b>

## Interviews Conducted

### Student Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted student focus groups at Taylor County High School, Taylor County Middle School, and Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center. Students were asked to share their perspective on topics such as courses, career goals, assistance received to prepare for life after high school, causes of drop out, disciplinary issues and additional resources or services needed.

Comments from the students included the following:

#### Taylor County High School (Grades 9-12)

- Students were asked to discuss postgraduation plans. They noted that their parents had met with school staff to discuss postgraduation plans, and that IEP teams had discussed postsecondary plans and had been helpful with setting goals. Students reported that although some classes had more support than others, teachers followed their IEPs.
- No student in the focus group stated that they had thought of dropping out. Reasons for not dropping out expressed by students included the potential for financial difficulties and the lack of job prospects or eligibility for military service for individuals without a high school diploma.
- Students felt that most students who drop out do so as a result of conflicts with other students and problems stemming from situations or circumstances from outside the school, and that these students did not feel comfortable discussing conflicts or problems with school staff, such as administrators or school counselors. Students stated that they had friends or family who they felt comfortable talking to if they began considering dropping out.
- Students were not aware of specific assistance available at the school to help them prepare for college, technical school or employment, but they felt such resources might be beneficial if available.
- Students also felt that classroom grades should be based on more activities (rather than on single assignments) and that the school dress code could be broadened.
- Students expressed frustration when discussing disciplinary procedures. Students reflected a belief that disciplinary referrals for in-school suspension (ISS) or out-of-school suspension (OSS) were overly prescribed to students by some staff for insubordination and “arguing” with staff. Students felt that some staff were too authoritarian in implementing classroom procedures or that they “abused” positions of authority. One student described a friend who received more than a week of ISS for arguing with a teacher. Students described personal experiences in ISS and remarked that the experience of ISS was itself a deterrent toward future infractions.
- When asked to discuss ways in which students’ experiences in school could be enhanced or improved, students replied that school used to be “fun” and was not anymore. Students explained that now they have less social and group contact than in the past.

#### Taylor County Middle School (Grades 6-8)

- When asked about intended postsecondary activities and goals, most students discussed goals such as attending and completing college, completing military service and getting married. Some students described a lack of discussion of their futures both at school and at home. However, other students noted that some college- and career-planning activities occurred at the

school, such as visits from college recruiters and discussions with school counselors. Some students also noted that they discussed their futures with friends and some family members.

- Students also believed that they had never participated in an IEP meeting. However, they stated that parents had. Students also believed that school staff only communicated with their parents whenever students were “in trouble.”
- When asked to discuss dropping out of school, most students indicated they had thought about or considered dropping out at some point in time. Some students expressed simply disliking the school environment or school staff as reasons for wanting to drop out. Other students stated reasons such as excessive or inappropriate disciplinary referrals and retention. However, students stated they decided to stay in school because of negative consequences of not graduating, such as employment or financial difficulties, or because of potential benefits of staying in school, such as having more opportunities while in school or after graduation.
- Most students expressed that there were individuals they felt comfortable speaking with when they had problems. Such individuals included friends, family members, C&C program staff and student mentors. Students expressed difficulties in working with teachers and school staff. Students felt that teachers would sometimes create situations in which students would be disciplined. Students also indicated that in some situations they would intentionally commit an infraction so as to get suspended and thus be removed from the environment.
- Students discussed a variety of concerns related to discipline, personal autonomy and racial or ethnic tensions. Students stated that typically with disciplinary referrals, administrators tended to accept teachers’ accounts without getting a student’s account of the circumstances as well. Students also felt that a student’s race had an effect on whether a student received a disciplinary referral and on what consequences might occur. Students also believed that some staff treated students differently if they participated in or were skilled at school-sponsored athletic activities.
- Students reported that they felt they did best with teachers and staff who were “kind” and willing to work with them under all circumstances. Students reported a desire for being able to discuss problems and disciplinary situations with other administrators and for being able to deliver feedback on teachers to administrators. Students also described doing best in smaller classes.

#### Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center

- Students indicated that they had knowledge of school disciplinary procedures, and noted that penalties included lunch detention and OSS. Students felt that suspension did not help students do better in school since it allowed students not to be in school.
- In response to questions about goals, students stated having career interests in areas such as carpentry, welding, natural resources and military service, and noted that on limited occasions, IEP team members and parents had discussed goals with them.
- Students reported that they did not know a lot about their IEPs and had not had a lot of interaction with IEP team members.
- Students also reported regularly thinking about dropping out and knew of individuals who had dropped out. However, they did not want to drop out due to potential consequences of dropping out (such as not getting a job and family disappointment).
- Students reported that they did not always feel comfortable with discussing feelings of wanting to drop out with school staff, and they were not aware of the C&C program availability at the school.
- Students felt that having less strict rules and procedures at the school would also help students stay in school.

## Teacher Focus Groups

Themes that evolved from the interviews and focus group from the teachers regarding graduation rates, dropout rates, discipline (4B) and LRE included the following:

### Taylor County High School

- A number of initiatives are in place to address graduation such as technical support from a reading coach, a reading lab, intensive reading, small group work, Kagan cooperative learning strategies, differentiated instruction, grade-level meetings, mentoring, parent and school collaboration, co-teaching, facilitated teaching and the use of other specific classroom management techniques.
- Graduation options are discussed with students and parents by the school's ESE coordinator and guidance staff.
- Programs such as Junior Reserve Officers' Training Core (JROTC), *Advancement Via Individual Determination* (AVID), and campus visits are helpful in assisting students with post-school planning and learning about career and college options.
- Students entering ninth grade at an older age may be more likely to drop out; however, teachers realize that each cohort of students presents differently and has different challenges. Students at risk of dropping out are identified via the district's EWS and are assigned a mentor through the C&C program.
- A primary strategy to address individual situations in which a student was considering dropping out involved parent contact and follow up from guidance or administrative staff.
- There are a variety of activities and programs available to prevent students from dropping out, such as extra tutoring, preparatory activities during summers, test-taking "boot camps" and community supports such as the Boys and Girls Club programs.
- An initiative for districtwide training in and support of staff use of Kagan cooperative learning strategies is in the third year of implementation and intended to support the use of differentiated instruction and universal design for learning (UDL). Other support for the use of differentiated instruction and UDL includes online programs such as *My Ascend Math and Study Island*, and free resources such as Khan Academy. Support facilitation is implemented for ESE students as well as students reading on level one.

### Taylor County Middle School

- There is awareness regarding disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities by race or ethnicity. Teachers receive information regarding attendance and suspensions by ethnicity annually and via regular administrative reports.
- Programs in place such as C&C and PBIS address discipline discrepancies and have been beneficial. In addition, teachers have attended TIC training.
- Some teachers expressed feeling challenged when attempting to work with parents and community members regarding students' attendance and discipline problems. Teachers believe that many students, parents and family members are overwhelmed with other difficulties and are forced to focus on simply meeting everyday needs rather than being able to consider decision making for students' futures.
- Standard procedures for determining appropriate suspension or expulsion referrals for students close to having more than 10 days of suspension or expulsion includes teachers and staff meeting to review the students' IEPs to determine what actions can be taken to prevent further disciplinary incidents. However, some students often want to be suspended.
- Additional activities are used as alternatives to out-of-school disciplinary actions, such as allowing students to spend after-school time with preferred staff members, using time-out procedures to de-escalate students, encouraging self monitoring and participating in the C&C program. Teachers would like to have a "full-time" C&C program at the school.

### Taylor County Elementary School

- Students with speech or language impairments or specific learning disabilities are served mostly in inclusive settings with regular ESE and speech language therapist support. Programs such as *My Ascend Math and Failure Free Reading* are used regularly, and after-school tutoring is also available to students. There are no students in general education classrooms working toward standards using access points.
- Teachers participated in professional development activities such as UDL, TIC and Kagan cooperative learning workshops.

### Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center

- Graduation rates improved due to more collaboration among teachers, the use of small groups and one-to-one relationships, better use of technology and blended learning, targeting students' deficiencies and improvements in scheduling reviews.
- Supports and interventions in place to help students graduate included, speaking with students about the purpose of education, accessible accommodations for online learning formats and dual enrollment options.
- For students with IEPs, supports included focusing discussion on goals and career possibilities during IEP team meetings and accommodations, such as extra time and separate rooms for testing.
- Post-school planning, college and career options, were addressed via participation in the C&C program, and also through activities such as dual enrollment, career and technical education class "shadowing," and participation in the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery assessment.
- Graduation options are typically discussed at IEP team meetings. Teachers did not know of other specific ways in which information about graduation options is disseminated. Teachers were knowledgeable regarding new diploma options and course code changes.
- A full continuum of placements was available at the school, including vision therapy, occupational therapy and music therapy.
- The online program allows for use of differentiated instruction and UDL. Teachers can determine students' areas of deficiency from assessment results.
- Other opportunities for the use of differentiated instruction and UDL included hands-on activities in science and math, individualized projects and working with students at their own pace.
- Regarding students dropping out, the school is a "last resort" for students, and students who dropped out typically did for reasons such as disinterest, disengagement, and the ability to earn a livelihood in the county without having a high school diploma. Indicators related to students dropping out included staff relationships with students, staff relationships with parents and student attendance.
- Parents are encouraged to be involved with students and the school, and teachers attempt to reach out to parents via emails, telephone calls and parent conferences.
- Working with students one-on-one and at the students' paces were beneficial in keeping students in school. In addition, students' participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, such as sports, clubs, the "prom," and JROTC, were beneficial.
- Programs and options such as C&C, dual enrollment, credit recovery, and being able to qualify for career and technical education funds (the federal Pell grant) were beneficial.
- For remediation options available for students for statewide, standardized assessments, preparatory activities and staff were available for the Florida Standards Assessment, Postsecondary Education Readiness Test, and the American College Test for all students.

## Administrator Focus Groups

Themes that evolved from the interviews and focus group with the administrators regarding graduation rates, dropout rates, discipline (4B) and LRE included the following:

### Taylor County High School

- Changes in graduation rates stemmed from the following initiatives, districtwide EWS, more outreach to students regarding consequences of not graduating, participation in the C&C program, data coaching with teachers, monthly administrative team meetings, and research and shadowing of other districts with increased graduation rates.
- The availability of credit recovery for each academic area, a computer lab and support facilitation, all contributed to increasing graduation rates. One administrator reported a desire to initiate pairing of students (a “buddy” system) for community opportunities.
- Teachers recognized that they may have students who are one or more grade levels behind, and need to ensure these students have the opportunity to successfully graduate with a standard diploma.
- Staff has been providing extra assistance to tenth graders with IEPs who need additional support in the general education environment.
- After-school tutoring is offered, and ESE teachers often offer one-on-one assistance to students during planning periods.
- The focus on graduation starts at younger grades now, not just for Grades 9-12.
- Concerns were initially received from veteran teachers and parents of non-ESE students regarding placement of students formerly seen as ESE students into general education classrooms; however, instances such as ESE students outperforming non-ESE students helped students, teachers and the community adjust to the changes.
- An instructional coach worked with teachers to ensure that they were aware of students’ IEPs and their individual backgrounds. Teachers have become very responsive and ask for help when needed.
- Graduation options, including scholar and merit designations, are discussed at every IEP team meeting.
- When parents or students ask about vocational options, staff explains requirements, but encourage students to take advantage of career and technical education opportunities if they are interested.
- Some students in the self-contained setting participated in activities such as JROTC and art. Supports for ESE students in the general education setting included a support facilitator and a designated ESE counselor.
- The increased availability of credit recovery helped students who might have otherwise fallen behind and opted to drop out of school.
- The dean of students and the school resource officer make home visits, and these visits have helped particularly with students who stopped coming to school within months of graduating.
- The dean also offered counseling to ESE students who received disciplinary referrals.
- The district social worker was involved when there were additional difficulties faced by a student’s family. For example, administrators found out that a student who had missed two weeks of school was out because there was no water available at the student’s home, and the social worker assisted the family with resources.
- An environment was created in which each student had a favorite staff member who they did not want to disappoint. These efforts were intended to show students that staff care about their well-being, while also making it difficult for students to drop out.
- In regard to college and career options and post-school planning, all ESE students were referred to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for assistance, and school staff and guest

visitors from North Florida Community College presented options to students. The AVID program also focuses on postsecondary planning, and military recruiters regularly visited the school.

- Trainers from FIN and the College Board conducted workshops on collaborative teaching (support facilitation), classroom technology and differentiated instruction. Every teacher also has access to PD 360 for continued professional development.

#### Taylor County Middle School

- Staff is familiar with students' rates of suspension and expulsion and the reported discrepancies. There have been several discussions with district leadership to address cases of students exhibiting severe behavior problems and how to keep them in school. Individualized Tier 3 interventions were used in these situations, but staff plans to modify these interventions for use with students with similar needs.
- All staff except one in the district attended TIC training. Some educators and staff have requested that cultural sensitivity training be provided.
- Some have expressed a belief that community issues, such as low educational attainment, poverty and lack of sufficient educational personnel, contribute to a lack of support for student achievement in the community. Many efforts are underway to build student engagement. The C&C program had a positive impact on student attendance and contributed to a decrease in students having thoughts about dropping out.
- Some students with more than 10 days of suspension or expulsion have sexually related or other code of conduct infractions that jeopardize the safety of others. Staff attempts to address these infractions via ISS, rather than OSS, whenever possible. When a student commits repeated infractions in the same category, staff are procedurally required to suspend the student per the district's code of conduct.
- If a manifestation determination meeting is held, student records are reviewed (a process that includes a group analysis of data) and discussed, and the team determines whether the disciplinary infraction is determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability or not. The schools ESE staffing specialist and counselor are responsible for managing the process.
- If a manifestation of the student's disability is determined, the team reverses the student's proposed suspension and provides make-up work and a recommendation sheet with input from all team members. The group data analysis is also reviewed to determine possible interventions for the student. The behavior specialist is developing a method to provide intervention recommendations more immediately to teachers. The process does not include an evaluative component to determine whether the interventions are having the desired impact; however, the specialist informally follows up with teachers. The team plans to work with PBIS staff to build an evaluative component.

#### Taylor County Elementary School

- The school serves primarily Grades 3-5, and also serves students with disabilities, kindergarten through Grade 5.
- Meetings regarding placement decisions were scheduled for incoming second-grade students and outgoing fifth-grade students. One inclusion teacher worked with students in Grades 3-5, and a speech-language therapist also provided whole-group instruction in general education settings with students with language impairments. The school also had a self-contained varying exceptionalities classroom with two teachers who were dually certified.
- Students transitioning from a self-contained classroom to a general education classroom or other contexts (e.g., field trips and extracurricular activities), have opportunities to "push out." As students became more comfortable in transitioning, opportunities can increase.
- More adult staff are needed to better support and facilitate service delivery for students with disabilities enrolled in both general education and access courses.

- To ensure that students with disabilities make progress in the general education curriculum, core curriculum materials are used with scaffolded instruction and dually certified teachers communicate regularly with general education teachers. Assistive technology for communication is available and laptops can be provided to students. However, only one inclusion teacher was available.

#### Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center

- Regarding the district's graduation rate for students with disabilities, systemic changes that have recently occurred, included additional teaching staff, increased use of direct instruction, better monitoring of data entry and the use of withdrawal codes, industry certification options and new diploma options, such as the merit designation.
- Supports and interventions in place to help students graduate included giving students individual attention and allowing extra time, the C&C program, special counselors and the availability of music therapy.
- School staff members were knowledgeable regarding students' diploma options.
- Regarding post-school planning, college and career options, teachers recommended programs for students on an individual basis, and teachers and counselors shared information with students. Dual enrollment options included, welding and health science programs.
- Regarding students dropping out of school, grades and attendance were monitored for all students because all students at the school were considered to be at risk of dropping out. Staff met with students and parents regularly, communicated via telephone, and meet weekly with students with disabilities. Students could also access the school's data systems.
- Regarding the use of differentiated instruction and UDL, teachers worked to support the needs of each student in order to help them complete the program and used differentiated instruction and UDL for all students because student needs were so different. Teachers met daily during a common planning period, and teachers with primarily general education students attended all IEP team meetings to become aware of accommodations.

#### School Walk-Through Debriefing

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at Taylor County Vocational Technical and Adult Center, Taylor County High School, Taylor County Middle School and Taylor County Elementary School. A total of 12 classrooms were visited. The following best practices were noted during the school walk-through debriefings:

- Classrooms were orderly and conducive to learning and structured activities were taking place. Rules and expectations were usually posted.
- Teacher-student ratios were typical, and students were engaged in learning activities. Materials in use included SMART boards, paper items, and computers.
- Settings and instructional methods included large and small groups, co-teaching and support facilitation.
- Recognition of student achievement (e.g., student work samples and photos of successful students) was observed in some settings.
- Security measures were in place. Staff and school resource officers were visibly present.

#### Commendations

1. The district's graduation rate and dropout rates improved dramatically since the last SST visit to the district in 2015.
2. Team members who visited Taylor County Career Academy were impressed with environmental and instructional improvements made since a previous SST visit to the school in 2013.

3. Team members noted the supportive learning environment and level of engagement of students at Taylor County Elementary School.
4. At Taylor County Middle School, team members noted the benefits of having an additional counselor serving as a point person in coordinating the needs of ESE students and observed successes at the student level with interventions and strategies using the MTSS process.

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

As part of the monitoring and assistance on-site visit, the on-site team members, ESE director and representatives from the Taylor County School District participated in a problem-solving and action-planning process. The group reviewed the data collected and observations made by SST members and selected student engagement as a priority goal. Action steps discussed included the following:

- Review school climate survey data and determine if survey modifications are appropriate.
- Explore potential funding options in order to sustain the C&C program.

A follow-up meeting was scheduled for March 3, 2016.

<b>Next Steps</b>	
<b>Graduation Rates</b>	
Summary	The district's federal graduation rate for students with disabilities increased from 26.3 percent in 2013-14 to 43.3 percent in 2014-15. Although this rate is lower than the state's rate of 56.8 percent, it indicates substantial improvement from 2013-14.
Recommendations	The district should continue implementing the variety of initiatives underway, including the C&C program, EWS implementation, data coaching and reviews, credit recovery options, administrative and team collaboration, tutoring, collaboration with transition and other discretionary project staff, and additional related action steps noted in the district's DIAP.
Required Action	None
<b>Dropout Rates</b>	
Summary	The district's federal dropout rate in 2013-14 was 36 percent, above the state's rate of 19.2 percent for that year. In 2014-15, the district decreased the rate to 7.7 percent, which is also below the state's rate of 18.7 percent.
Recommendations	The district should continue implementation of the EWS, dropout rate data reviews on a monthly or quarterly basis, implementation of Academic Parent Teacher Teams initiative and attendance goal planning, MTSS, collaboration with community-based organizations, and additional related action steps noted in the district's DIAP.
Required Action	None

<b>Discipline – 4B</b>	
Summary	The district's risk ratio in 2013-14 was 4.67 for incidents of removal of black students with disabilities through suspension and expulsion for greater than 10 days in a school year (the state rate was 2.92). In 2014-15 the rate decreased to 4.63 percent, but was still above the state rate (2.72).
Recommendations	As discussed during the DAPPS meeting held on January 20, 2016, the district should review climate survey data for trends and determine whether additional data should be collected, and continue to explore options for sustaining the C&C program. The district should also continue implementation of PBIS and MTSS activities and initiatives. The district should also continue completion of related action steps in the DIAP, such as continued implementation of the EWS; trainings in PBIS, TIC, de-escalation, cultural diversity and the use of RTI-B; RTI-B and discipline data reviews; and continued analysis of suspension and expulsion rate data.
Required Action	Provide the district's BEESS liaison with a narrative statement by <b>August 31, 2016</b> , describing updates for each of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review of the climate survey data for trends and if it was determined that additional data should be collected</li> <li>• Additional options explored to continue sustaining the C&amp;C program</li> <li>• Implementation of PBIS activities</li> </ul>
<b>Educational Environment (LRE)</b>	
Summary	In 2013-14, the district's regular class placement rate was 75 percent, which was an increase from 71.5 percent in 2012-13. In 2014-15, the district's rate decreased slightly to 72.5 percent, which was below the state rate of 74.4 percent. In 2015-16, LRE data for the regular classroom indicated the district's rate increased to 78 percent, which was higher than the state rate of 73 percent.
Recommendations	The district should continue to implement activities and strategies identified in the district's BPIE action plan.
Required Actions	None
<b>Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance Process</b>	
Summary	By <b>March 31, 2017</b> , 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, via a scheduled telephone call. The district will provide documentation to their BEESS liaison which will be discussed prior to the scheduled call.

## Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing an 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 **ESE Policies and Procedures** document provides district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual, physical or mechanical restraint and seclusion. The school district's document for the 2013-14 through 2015-16 school years may be accessed at <http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx>.
3. The technical assistance paper entitled **Guidelines for the Use, Documentation, Reporting, and Monitoring of Restraint and Seclusion with Students with Disabilities**, dated October 14, 2011, may be accessed at <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-6212/dps-2011-165.pdf>. This document provides guidance regarding the use, documenting, reporting and monitoring of restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities in school districts, including (a) when restraint or seclusion might be used, (b) considerations when selecting a training program for restraint, (c) what should be documented, (d) parent notification and reporting, and (e) monitoring use. It also contains information about s. 1003.573, F.S., Use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities.
4. The United States Department of Education, in collaboration with the United States Department of Justice, released **School Discipline Guidance** in January 2014, **Volume 4, Issue 1 of the Office of Special Education Programs Monthly Update**. This package will assist states, districts and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate, and ensure those policies and practices comply with federal law. The resource documents listed below are included in the package, and are available at <http://www.ed.gov/school-discipline>.
  - **Dear Colleague** guidance letter on civil rights and discipline
  - **Guiding Principles** document that draws from emerging research and best practices
  - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources** that indexes federal technical assistance and other resources
  - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations** that catalogue state laws and regulations related to school discipline
5. **Functional Behavioral Assessments and Positive Intervention Benchmarks of Effective Practice** (Florida's PBIS Project) may be accessed at [http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/pbs\\_FBA\\_Benchmarks.pdf](http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/pbs_FBA_Benchmarks.pdf).
6. **PS:RtI Technology** may be accessed at <http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>. One function of this project provides regional technology coordinators and technology specialists the support to effectively implement accessible instructional materials, assistive technologies, learning technologies, and 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 Taylor County School District  
FDOE, BEESS Discretionary Projects**

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