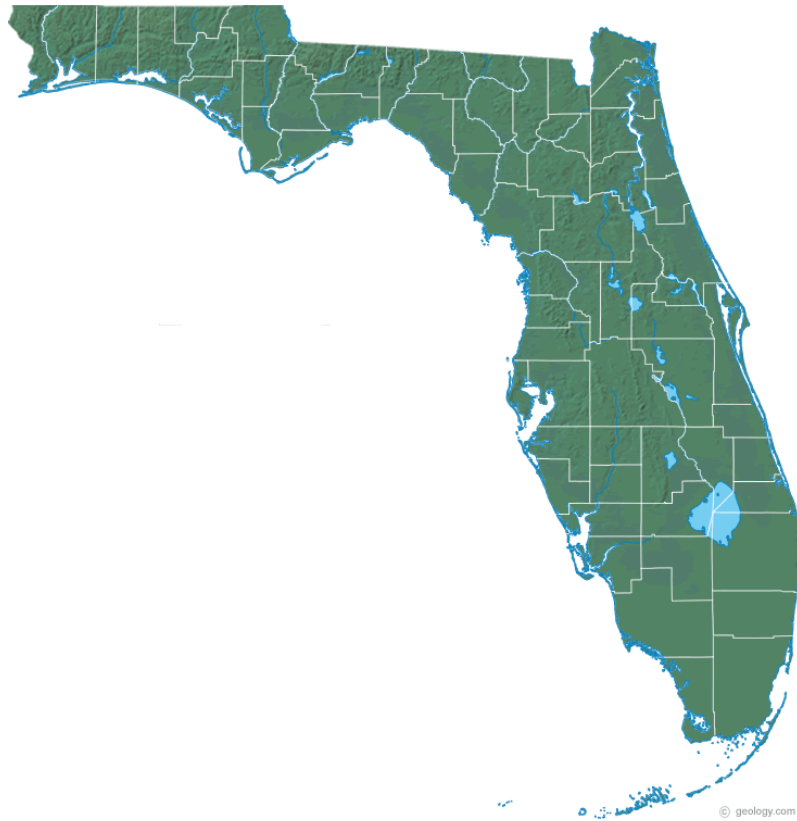# Hillsborough County School District

Final Report: On-Site Review
Exceptional Student Education Programs

March 15–17, 2011

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education

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Just Read, Florida!

May 6, 2011

Ms. MaryEllen Elia, Superintendent
Hillsborough County School District
P.O. Box 3408
Tampa, Florida 33601

Dear Superintendent Elia:

We are pleased to provide you with the *Final Report: On-Site Review of Exceptional Student Education Programs* for the Hillsborough County School District. This report was developed by integrating multiple sources of information related to an on-site visit to your district March 15–17, 2011, which included student record reviews, interviews with school and district staff, and classroom observations. The final report will be posted on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services' website and may be accessed at http://www.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp.

The Hillsborough County School District was selected for an on-site visit to review the district's problem solving/response to intervention (PS/RtI) process. Ms. Joyce Wieland, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) General Director, and her staff were very helpful during the Bureau's preparation for the visit and during the on-site visit, as was Ms. Tracy Schatzberg, Supervisor, Psychological Services. In addition, the principals and other staff members at the schools welcomed and assisted Bureau staff members. The Bureau's on-site visit identified strengths and targets for support within the district's PS/RtI processes.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services for exceptional education for students in Hillsborough County. If there are any questions regarding this final report, please contact Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance, at (850) 245-0476 or via e-mail at Patricia.Howell@fldoe.org.

Sincerely,

Bambi J. Lockman, Chief
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Enclosure

cc: Joyce Wieland   Tracy Schatzberg   Patricia Howell
        Cristina Benito   Kim C. Komisar   Vicki L. Eddy

BAMBI J. LOCKMAN
Chief
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Hillsborough County School District

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Final Report

Authority

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (Bureau), 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 laws and rules related to exceptional student education (ESE); sections 1001.03(8) and 1008.32, Florida Statutes [F.S.]). One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (section 300.1(d) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]). In accordance with IDEA, the Bureau is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Act and the educational requirements of the State are implemented (34 CFR §300.149(a)(1) and (2)).

In fulfilling this requirement, the Bureau monitors ESE programs district school boards provide in accordance with sections 1001.42 and 1003.57, F.S. Through these monitoring activities, the Bureau examines and evaluates ESE procedures, records, and services; provides information and assistance to school districts; and otherwise helps school districts operate effectively and efficiently. The monitoring system is designed to emphasize improved educational outcomes for students while ensuring compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations and state statutes and rules.

Monitoring Process

District Selection

Districts were selected for on-site monitoring during the 2010–11 school year based on the following criteria:
- Matrix of services:
  - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 150 percent of the state rate for **at least one** of the following:
    - 254 (> 7.38 percent)
    - 255 (> 3.15 percent)
    - 254/255 combined (> 10.53 percent)
  - Districts that report students for weighted funding at > 125 percent of the state rate for **two or more** of the following cost factors:
    - 254 (> 6.15 percent)
    - 255 (> 2.63 percent)
    - 254/255 combined (> 8.78 percent)

- Pattern of poor performance over time in one or more targeted State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators, as evidenced by demonstrated progress below that of other targeted districts, and at least one of the following:
  – Targeted for a given SPP indicator or cluster of indicators for three consecutive years
  – Targeted for two or more SPP indicators or clusters of indicators for two consecutive years
- Problem solving/response to intervention (PS/RtI)
  – Eligible for on-site monitoring based on matrix of services or a pattern of poor performance over time on SPP indicators
  – Status as a pilot district for PS/RtI implementation; extent of implementation thus far

In a letter dated August 17, 2010, the Hillsborough County School District superintendent was informed that the district was selected for an on-site visit for review of the district's implementation of the PS/RtI process.

On-Site Activities

Monitoring Team
During March 15–17, 2011, Bureau staff members conducted an on-site visit to review the district's implementation of a PS/RtI process as it carries out its child find obligation to identify and evaluate students suspected of having a disability. The following Bureau staff members participated in the on-site visit:
- Vicki Eddy, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance (Team Leader)
- Patricia Howell, Program Director, Monitoring and Compliance
- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Liz Conn, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Brenda Fisher, Program Specialist, Monitoring and Compliance
- Lindsey Granger, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution
- Karlene Deware, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution
- David Wheeler, Psychology Consultant, Student Support Services Project

Schools
The following schools were selected for site visits in collaboration with district staff to reflect different stages of PS/RtI implementation:
- Bryant Elementary School
- Eisenhower Middle School
- Hunters Green Elementary School
- Kimbell Elementary School
- Knights Elementary School
- Sulphur Springs Elementary School

Data Collection
On-site activities included the following:
- District-level interview – 7 participants
- School-level interviews – 69 participants
- Record reviews – 23 students enrolled in kindergarten through grade six
- Case studies – 18 students

Review of Records
The district was asked to provide documentation related to the PS/RtI process for 23 students in six identified schools. This information was used to examine implementation of PS/RtI across the district.

Results

There were no findings of noncompliance identified during the review of records. The following strengths and targets for support reflect the data collected through the activities of the on-site visit and discussions with district and school personnel.

Strengths

The following comments apply to all of the schools visited:
- Friendly, orderly, and well-organized schools with strong administrative leadership and high levels of professionalism, commitment, and collaboration among staff members
- Sense of shared ownership of PS/RtI by school administrators and staff committed to expanding and improving implementation of the PS/RtI framework
- Commitment to the use of research-based curriculum matched to student need and reliance on data to inform instructional decisions by grade-level teams participating in the problem-solving process
- Use of Easy Curriculum Based Measures to display RtI data for students and evidence of multiple sources of data used for data analysis/interventions (e.g., running records; Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading data; Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores; Developmental Reading Assessment; Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition; SuccessMaker; ThinkLink; istation; Continuous Improvement Model)
- High level of student engagement evident during classroom observations, with motivated staff committed to creating a positive learning environment in which to implement effective interventions

In addition, the monitoring team noted the following regarding individual schools visited:
- Bryant Elementary School:
  - Mentoring and leadership roles that support professional development for new teachers
  - Effective graphing of data, with graphs reviewed and interventions discussed twice monthly during problem-solving leadership team (PSLT) meetings related to tier two and three interventions
  - Use of Resource Maps by PSLT for intervention strategies
  - Productive PS/RtI team meetings with consistent involvement of school psychologist; effective documentation of the RtI process; and involvement of professional learning communities in PS/RtI
  - Use of outside support when additional resources are needed, and interventions offered before the start of the school day with support from parents
- Eisenhower Middle School:
  - Focus on effective student-specific behavioral interventions evidenced by administrator's appreciation of the unique behavioral characteristics of middle school students; anecdotal behavior logs kept by teachers (e.g., parent contacts, lunch detention); recommended interventions checklist used to decrease need for disciplinary referrals; individualized point sheets for student expectations (i.e., use of appropriate language, complying with

teacher redirection); and 40 percent drop in discipline referrals during past year reported by the school, including data showing that behaviors during past five years have decreased in intensity (e.g., from gang problems to tardiness)

– Implementation of programs such as *Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success* (CHAMPS); the *Derrick Brooks Charities Youth Programs*, a grant-funded program held at school once a week offering youth anger management activities and counseling activities for students; and the *Ophelia Project*, offering students with behavioral needs bi-weekly meetings regarding self-esteem and self-confidence and evening meetings for parents regarding transitioning to middle school

– On-going professional development and support for teacher accountability, with administrators in classrooms regularly providing supports and conducting observations of students and teachers to ensure intervention fidelity; schoolwide discipline data charted and posted in hallways for school staff to view; and Kagan training provided to support teachers' efforts to engage students in higher order thinking activities

– Parent participation in conferences regarding student behavior; after school tutoring available four days per week, including transportation; and use of early release days to re-teach skills to students

- Hunters Green Elementary School:
  - PS/RtI process focused on ensuring effective interventions implemented within a concise timeframe; significant level of support for English language learners (ELL); weekly PSLT meetings; and mentoring of new incoming teachers regarding the PS/RtI process
  - Tutoring sessions provided for students based on data review process
  - Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program that includes incentives earned during bus transportation; effective classroom management techniques observed, with students highly engaged during interventions; clear instructions and positive feedback from teachers while providing strategies; and use of daily folders sent home with the students to keep parents informed of student progress

- Kimbell Elementary School:
  - PS/RtI process that incorporates grade level "data chats" every six weeks to discuss core instruction and individual student needs; a data wall displaying a fluid process for the provision of interventions; intervention fidelity checks, including walk-through classroom visits by administration and face-to-face communication with teachers; and staff flexibility and willingness to assume different roles based on student need
  - Promising interventions include "Cougar Time" interventions provided daily to all students; before and after school tutoring programs offered at no cost to families; and Positive Actions with Students PBS program

- Knights Elementary School:
  - PS/RtI process that includes "back-up plan" for provision of interventions when teachers are absent; substantial support at all three tiers of instruction and intervention; consistent involvement of a full-time school psychologist and a reading coach; and support for data collection that allows more time for teachers to implement interventions
  - Commitment to student improvement evidenced by a five-year plan focused on annual acceleration of skills beyond one year's growth; administration's "open-door" policy for teachers and parents; and a collaborative, nurturing school environment that encourages professional growth

- Sulphur Springs Elementary School:
  - Implementation of school-based programs such as Grab-n-Go breakfast offered for parents once every other week providing schoolwide information; interventions implemented during "Lunch-n-Learn" and the Extended Learning Program before and after school; application of Covey's "7 Habits" value system in alignment with the problem-solving process with the PBS model; and the Parent and Child Advance Together grant-funded program using research-based educational programs
  - PS/RtI process expanded beyond the school environment as staff members aid parents, provide clothing, and help to ensure students' access to before school interventions and Saturday school; "data walls" used for tracking fidelity; student-created data notebooks; and YMCA after school program provided at no cost to siblings of students being provided interventions
  - Advancement from being a double F school to a B school; making adequate yearly progress; and status as a PBS gold level model trained school
  - Strong and varied community partnerships (e.g., Community Partnership Library; Lela House being built nearby for prenatal mothers in need of support; Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone model used to support families of children from birth to grade five)

Targets for Support

The following challenges and areas in need of additional support or technical assistance were noted during discussions with school and district staff and through record reviews:
- Clear documentation of gap analysis is needed, including analyzing the gap between the performance of a given student and the benchmarks, and between a given student and the peer group, to determine if reasonable progress is being made.
- Stronger hypotheses identifying the root of the problem are needed. Hypotheses should be tested across multiple domains to support the identification of effective interventions.
- The intervention logs do not always detail the process of intervention development and implementation. More consistent written documentation of the PS/RtI process for individual students is needed, including complete dates, with caution not to impose an undue burden on team members.
- Parent involvement needs to be strengthened in the individual problem-solving meetings.
- The frequency of progress monitoring may require more data points for testing intervals.
- Additional instruction is needed regarding determining whether a student's progress is sufficient and when changes in intervention should be made.
- Possible duplication of efforts may exist in the area of assessment due to the extensive use of resources.
- At one of the schools visited, referrals to the PS/RtI team were initiated primarily by teachers relying on informal criteria rather than through a data-based referral system.
- RtI progress monitoring and benchmark progress monitoring are essential to informing instruction and monitoring progress, but they serve different functions. RtI progress-monitoring tools allow student progress to be tracked over time using probes of equivalent difficulty that are sensitive to growth. At one school visited, it appeared that multiple benchmark progress-monitoring instruments are used, but few RtI progress-monitoring tools were evident.

- At one school visited, the same terminology was used to describe disciplinary actions or consequences and PS/RtI interventions (e.g., tier one, tier two, tier three, tier four, and tier five for discipline). It is important to differentiate between consequences applied in response to a behavior and interventions that are implemented to reduce (or increase) the likelihood of a particular response.
- Intelligence quotient testing is no longer required when determining eligibility for specific learning disabilities and should only be administered on an individual need basis (e.g., necessary to rule out an intellectual disability). (Rule 6A-6.0331(5), Florida Administrative Code)

Recommendations

The following recommendations were noted during discussions with school and district staff:
- Record meeting notes for problem-solving meetings for individual students documenting the PS/RtI process in place.
- Consider developing a concise summary of the problem-solving process that integrates all three tiers and interventions for clarity, referring to the decision-making tool entitled *Guiding Tools for Instructional Problem Solving* for guidance which can be accessed at http://www.florida-rti.org/_docs/GTIPS.pdf.
- Continue to support school-based PS/RtI teams to ensure that identification and evaluation of students suspected of having a disability is timely and that implementation of PS/RtI does not inadvertently delay the evaluation process.

Technical Assistance

Specific information for technical assistance, support, and guidance to school districts regarding problem solving and response to instruction or intervention can be found on the Florida's response to instruction/intervention website at http://www.florida-rti.org.

Bureau Contacts

The following is a partial list of Bureau staff available for technical assistance:

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Florida Department of Education
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Bureau	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
BRIC	Bureau Resource and Information Center
CHAMPS	Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
ELL	English language learners
ESE	Exceptional student education
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
PSLT	Problem-solving leadership team
PS/RtI	Problem solving/response to intervention
RtI	Response to intervention
SPP	State Performance Plan

Florida Department of Education
Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner

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