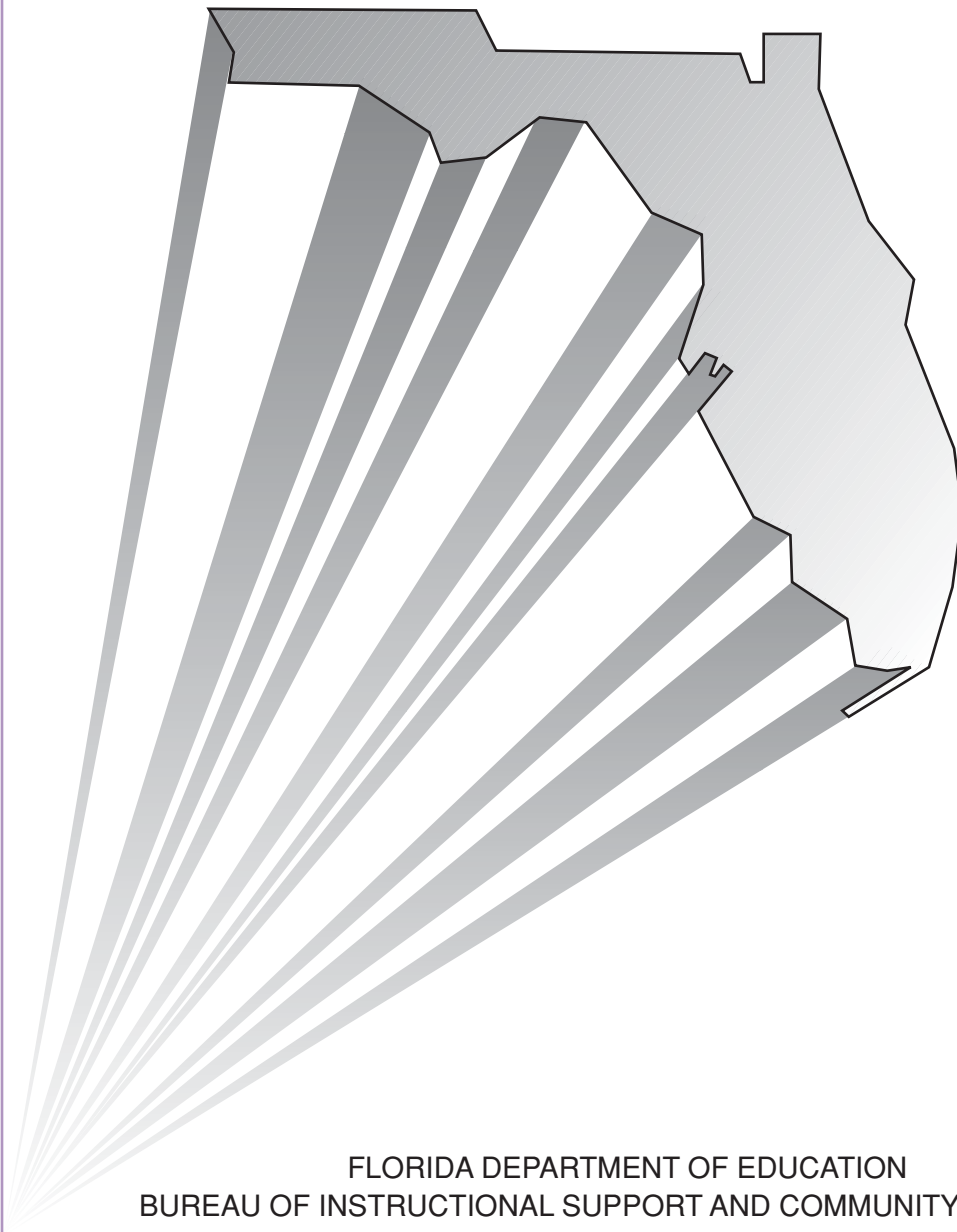


FINAL REPORT OF FOLLOW-UP MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

LEE COUNTY

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 1, 2003



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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November 3, 2003

Ms. Terry Andrews, Director
Exceptional Student Education
Lee County School District
2523 Market Street
Fort Myers, Florida 33901

Dear Ms. Andrews:

Thank you for your hospitality and professionalism during our recent follow-up monitoring visit, September 30-October 1, 2003. During the visit, the district provided a status report in response to the final monitoring report from the May 2001 focused monitoring visit. Visits to selected sites were conducted to verify information presented by the district. Bureau staff has reviewed the additional information collected during the visit and a report of this visit is attached.

The district has fulfilled the requirements of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2001 monitoring visit. You are not required to submit an additional status report. However, the district is required to address findings related to the following topics addressed in the report:

- dropout rate
- general supervision (IEP compliance)
- gifted services
- speech/language services at the juvenile justice facilities

Strategies and outcome measures that address these areas of concern must be included in the continuous improvement monitoring plan status report to be submitted in December 2003.

We appreciate your ongoing efforts on behalf of exceptional students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Shan Goff".

Shan Goff

cc: Dr. James Browder
Eileen Amy
Michele Polland

SHAN GOFF

K-12 Deputy Chancellor for Student Achievement

Lee County School District Follow-Up Monitoring Visit September 30-October 1, 2003

During the week of September 29, 2003, the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, conducted an on-site follow-up review of the exceptional student education (ESE) programs in Lee County Public Schools. The primary purpose for conducting follow-up visits to districts previously monitored is to afford school districts an opportunity to offer validation of the activities they have undertaken through their system improvement plans. These visits provide an assurance to the Bureau that the strategies agreed to in the improvement plans are being implemented. They also give districts an opportunity to demonstrate progress, as well as for districts to request additional technical assistance regarding the implementation of their system improvement plans.

Lee County was selected for monitoring in 2001 on the basis of the percent of students with disabilities who drop out of school. The results of the follow-up visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted May 21-25, 2001:

- dropout rate
- general supervision
- parent participation
- least restrictive environment
- gifted services
- child find
- transition from Part C to Part B programs
- secondary transition
- access to general curriculum

Site Visit

The primary on-site activity conducted as part of the follow-up monitoring visit was a demonstration by the district of the strategies implemented thus far through the system improvement plan developed as result of the 2001 focused monitoring process. The components of the demonstration were determined by the district based on the areas targeted for improvement, and the types of activities conducted by the district.

The demonstration by Lee County included presentations related to the implementation of strategies identified in the system improvement plan based on categories from the final monitoring report. Terry Andrews, Director, Exceptional Student Education, served as the coordinator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. In addition, the following district staff participated in the presentation: Mike Bursztyn, Jackie Turner, Susan Morris, Michelle McNerney, Connie Galek, Christine Raptis-Wright, Barbara Williams, Donna Djerf, Elaine Ford, Deb Sowa, Cathy Cochrane, Pam Berryman, and Lauren Lovell. These participants should be commended for a presentation that was well prepared and well executed.

In addition to the district presentation, the follow-up visit included visits to Orangewood Elementary School, North Fort Myers High School, Richard Milburn Charter High School, and Southwest Regional Juvenile Justice Center for the purpose of validating information provided during the district presentation. The visit also included compliance monitoring in the areas of individual educational plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities, educational plans (EPs) for students identified as gifted, the provision of counseling as a related service, and speech and language services. School site visits included the following:

- eleven interviews with selected district and school staff
- six classroom visits
- reviews of four Educational Plans (EPs) for students identified as gifted
- reviews of 19 Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities

Results

Dropout Rate

Although there were no findings of noncompliance from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of dropout, there were concerns related to this category. Major concerns were related to the reporting of data. Strategies implemented to address the area of dropout included the following:

- data collection and analysis
- implementation/expansion of several programs to encourage students to remain in school (Life Centered Career Education, self-determination, transition planning, talent assessment, Dare to Dream, Truancy Intervention Program, Quality Designs for Instruction {QDI},...)
- department meetings to increase awareness of the dropout issue
- increased dropout retrieval activities
- implementation of an alternative education program for students to earn additional credits
- use of additional computer programs

The district presented evidence of the results of the dropout retrieval program and should be commended for its efforts to encourage the return of students who have dropped out. One-third of the students contacted through the retrieval program have returned to pursue a diploma. The district has been asked to present its retrieval program at a national-level conference.

Despite the efforts described above, Lee County continues to struggle in the area of dropout. According to the 2003 local education agency (LEA) profile, the dropout rate for students with disabilities during the 1999-00 school year was 7% while the rate for the 2001-02 school year had risen to 9%. District staff reported that data issues continue to be of concern to the district. There is concern that students enrolled in the juvenile justice facilities are not being coded correctly when they leave those facilities. It is recommended that the district contact Florida Department of Education for assistance in data verification. The district's continuous improvement monitoring plan addresses the dropout rate for students with disabilities. The district will be required to incorporate additional strategies to address this area in its continuous plan.

General Supervision

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of general supervision were related to IEP compliance. Strategies implemented by the district to address compliance in the area of IEPs included the following:

- “train the trainer” workshops for consultative teachers
- training for teachers related to compliant IEPs
- revision of district forms
- development and implementation of computerized IEPs
- district self-assessment of 20 IEPs (seven of which were transition IEPs)

The district presentation included a summary of the district self-assessment of IEP compliance. Self-assessment revealed strengths in the areas of alternate assessment and secondary transition components. The report indicated a continued need for monitoring in the following areas of IEP compliance:

- measurable annual goals
- appropriate members of IEP team present at meetings
- explanation of the extent to which the student will not participate with nondisabled peers
- the consideration of the results of district or statewide assessment in the development of the IEP.

School visits and record reviews verified improvement in many areas of IEP compliance. The areas noted by the district as areas of continued need were also verified by Bureau staff. In addition, Bureau staff noted a continued need for self-monitoring related to the purpose of the IEP meeting (transition) identified on the parent notice, correspondence between goals and needs identified in the present level statements, and the explanation of the extent to which a student will not participate with nondisabled peers. The district will be required to continue its efforts to improve IEP compliance through self-assessments reported in its continuous improvement monitoring plan.

Parent Participation

Findings and areas of concern from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of parent participation indicated that the concerns of parents were not consistently documented on the IEP, and parents’ perceptions of the availability of information. Strategies implemented by the district to address these areas include the following:

- conducted student focus groups
- conducted family focus groups
- conducted family information nights
- utilized parent liaison position to provide direct support to parents
- created transition information packets to be distributed to parents at transition meetings
- created transition resource manual for teachers to be used in writing meaningful transition IEPs
- encouraged and obtained greater parent participation in ESE advisory council

Documentation provided by the district prior to the on-site visit confirmed these activities. The presentation by the district parent liaison provided explanations of the parent activities and data related to parent workshops. The district continues to encourage parent participation and has

scheduled a follow-up family focus group for this school year to determine progress made in this area.

Record reviews verified the documentation of parent concerns in the development of most IEPs. The district has fulfilled all requirements of this category and should be commended in its continued efforts to increase parent participation.

Least Restrictive Environment

The only finding from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of least restrictive environment (LRE) was that a student's IEP indicated resource level placement while the student was actually in separate class placement. Concerns of parents and Bureau staff in the 2001 monitoring report were related to separate class placement. According to the 2003 LEA profile, 49% of students with disabilities in the district are served in the regular class placement (80% or more of the day with nondisabled peers). This is slightly above the state average. 87% of the students identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) are served in separate class placement (less than 40% of the day with nondisabled peers). This is significantly above the state average of 61%.

Strategies implemented by the district to address this area included:

- implementation of QDI at schools not previously implementing
- continuation of QDI model at schools previously implementing
- district financial support to schools to assist with the implementation of the QDI model

The district presentation indicated that schools participating in the QDI model must develop a school-wide plan for implementation. The on-site visit to an inclusion school did not verify the existence of such a plan.

District data verify that the use of the inclusionary QDI model has had a steady, positive impact on the regular class placement in the district, yet has had no impact on separate class placement. It appears that the resource level of placement is rarely used in the district. The district has completed all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan; however, continued efforts toward improvement in this area are expected.

Gifted Services

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of the provision of gifted services were related to EP compliance, including the following: lack of appropriate team members at the EP meeting; lack of student outcomes; inadequate present level statements; lack of evaluation criteria, procedures, and schedules; and, lack of identification of persons to attend the meeting on the parent notice. In addition, students were determined eligible for the gifted program using partial scores without justification statements and there was a lack of services for students identified as gifted at the high school level. Vacant psychologist positions were believed to impact some of these areas of concern. The district has implemented the following strategies to address these issues:

- provided technical support to teachers of the gifted regarding EP compliance
- established EP revision committee
- developed service delivery model for students at the high school level
- aggressively recruited and filled vacant psychologist positions

The district presentation verified the implementation of these strategies. Psychologist positions have been filled. In addition, the district is using the technical assistance paper from the Department of Education related to the use of partial scores to determine eligibility.

The district continues to have a wide range of service delivery models for students at the elementary and middle school levels. It has developed and implemented a consultative model for students in the ninth grade. It is expected that this model will be expanded to include all students at the high school level.

The review of student records revealed compliance with all areas of EP noncompliance, with the exception of student outcomes at the high school level. The outcomes provided to Bureau staff are to be considered program goals, rather than individual goals, as indicated by the teacher of the gifted. The district has completed all action steps in this area of the system improvement plan but will be required to continue to address the area of gifted services and student outcomes at the high school level.

Child Find

There were no findings of noncompliance from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of child find.

Transition from Part C to Part B Programs

There were no findings of noncompliance from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of transition from Part C to Part B programs.

Secondary Transition

Findings from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of secondary transition were related to lack of agency invitation and/or participation at transition meetings and lack of student invitation to transition meetings. Prior to the on-site visit, the district provided documentation of training related to transition issues and participation in the Project Transition Interagency Council. In addition, the district has created transition information packets for parents and a transition resource manual for teachers to aid in the development of meaningful transition IEPs. Random reviews of student records conducted by the district revealed that transition components of the IEP are now compliant. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Access to the General Curriculum

Although there were no findings of noncompliance from the 2001 monitoring report in the area of access to the general curriculum, there were concerns. Areas of concern included diploma option decision-making, lack of participation in Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and lack of classroom accommodations. The implementation of an inclusion model at over 30 schools is addressing the area of access to the general curriculum. In its status report prior to the visit, the district provided documentation of training for district and school-level staff related to these concerns. On-site record reviews revealed compliance in this area. The district has met all requirements in this area of the system improvement plan.

Additional Compliance

In addition to monitoring categories included in the 2001 final report, the Bureau also conducted interviews related to the provision of speech and language services and counseling as a related service. Through interviews and record reviews, it appears that the speech and language needs of students are being met. Although only speech/language pathologists write goals in the communication domain, classroom teachers address students' language needs if students have not met eligibility criteria for a language disability. Consultation between general education and ESE teachers also support students who demonstrate a need in the communication domain. It was reported that the juvenile justice center has been unable to get speech/language services for students identified as eligible for those services. The district will be required to address this issue.

It appears that referrals to outside agencies for counseling services are routinely provided to students with disabilities who are in need of such services. These services are documented on the IEP. It was reported that outside agencies provide services in the schools as well as outside the schools. In addition, social workers and school counselors routinely provide group and individual counseling to all students in the schools who have needs in this area.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services conducted a follow-up monitoring visit to Lee County District Schools during the week of September 29, 2003. The visit served to verify that the district had adequately met all requirements of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in May 2001. Through presentations and on-site visits, the district demonstrated improvement in all areas. All requirements have been met in the following categories:

- parent participation
- least restrictive environment
- child find
- transition from Part C to Part B programs
- secondary transition
- access to general curriculum

Areas in which continued improvement is required must be addressed in the district's continuous improvement monitoring plan. Strategies and outcome measures addressing these areas must be reported in the status report submitted in December 2003. The areas demonstrating continued need are as follows:

- dropout rate
- general supervision (IEP compliance)
- gifted services
- speech/language services at the juvenile justice facilities