

FINAL REPORT OF VERIFICATION MONITORING OF
EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

OCTOBER 13 - 15, 2004



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES
ESE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

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February 11, 2005

Ms. Brucie Ball, Assistant Superintendent
Division of Exceptional Student Education
Miami-Dade County School District
1500 Biscayne Boulevard, Room 407P
Miami, Florida 33132

Dear Ms. Ball:

Thank you for your hospitality during our recent verification monitoring visit, October 13-15, 2004. During the visit, the district provided a comprehensive and well organized status report in response to the final monitoring report from the September 23-27, 2002 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.

- While the district has completed the strategies of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2002 monitoring visit, the district must submit a final status report in May 2005 related to this plan.

We appreciate your ongoing efforts on behalf of exceptional students. Please contact Kim Komisar, Program Director, at (850) 245-0476 or via electronic mail at Kim.Komisar@fldoe.org if we can be of any further assistance to your district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bambi J. Lockman".

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

cc: Rudolph Crew
Eileen Amy
Kim Komisar

BAMBI J. LOCKMAN
Chief

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

**Miami-Dade County Final Monitoring Report
Verification Monitoring Visit
October 13-15, 2004**

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Miami-Dade County School District Verification Monitoring report October 13-15, 2004

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, conducted an on-site verification review of the exceptional student education (ESE) program in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) from October 13-15, 2004. The primary purpose for conducting verification 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 plan. These visits provide an assurance to the Bureau that the strategies agreed to in the improvement plan 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 plan.

MDCPS was selected for monitoring in September 2002 on the basis of the percent of students with disabilities in regular class placement (i.e., spending 80% or more of the school day with nondisabled peers), and developed a system improvement plan (SIP) to address specific concerns and/or findings of noncompliance noted by the Bureau at that time. The results of the verification visit are reported under the following categories or related areas that were included in the final monitoring report of the focused monitoring visit conducted in 2002.

- staff knowledge and training
- placement
- curriculum and instruction
- behavior/discipline
- record reviews
- form reviews

Additional areas addressed during this verification visit include the following:

- the provision of counseling as a related service
- addressing the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech or language impaired
- school to post-school transition

Site Visit

The primary on-site activity conducted as a part of the verification monitoring visit was a demonstration by the district of the strategies implemented thus far through the system improvement plan developed as a result of the 2002 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 MDCPS included a presentation related to the implementation of strategies identified in the system improvement plan based on categories from the final monitoring report. A folder outlining specific district activities related to the system improvement plan was prepared and presented to bureau staff and peer monitors. Brucie Ball,

Assistant Superintendent for Exceptional Student Education and Student/Career Services, provided an overview of the activities during the district presentation. Joanne Rosen, Educational Specialist, served as the coordinator and point of contact for the district during the monitoring visit. The following district staff participated in the presentations: Cathy Orlando, Debbie Karch, Diedre Marshall, Aurora Vaccaro, Roni Bader-Tables, Timothy Andexler, and Robin Morrison. In addition, the following district staff provided insight into specific district, access center, and school activities, Ron Felton, Tina Rhyne, Will Gordillo, Enid Weisman, Jack Gilbert, Kate Cadieux, Margarita Morena, and Kathy Maguire. All participants should be commended for the presentation of information that was thorough, well-prepared, and well executed; the written documentation verified the information presented orally.

In addition to the district presentation, the verification visit included site-visits to the following schools for the purpose of validating information provided during the district presentation and through submission of status reports on activities conducted through the system improvement plan:

- Dante Fascell Elementary School
- G. Holmes Braddock High School
- Greynolds Park Elementary School
- H. D. McMillan Middle School
- J. F. Kennedy Middle School
- Miami Norland Senior High School
- North Miami Beach Senior High School
- Palm Springs Middle School
- Tropical Elementary School

The visit included the following activities:

- 52 interviews with selected school and district staff
- reviews of 42 IEPs for students with disabilities
- reviews of 6 matrix of service documents

Results

Staff Knowledge and Training

This section includes information related to specific training provided to school or district staff that may be expected to have an impact on the placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the area of staff knowledge and training were related to the continued need for teachers and administrators be provided staff development in the areas of inclusionary practices, effective instructional strategies for diverse learners, and instructional accommodations for students with disabilities. Strategies implemented through the system improvement plan designed to address the areas of staff knowledge and training included the following:

- training in: the districts All Students All Schools Initiative; differentiated curriculum; cooperative learning; accommodations and modifications; inclusive practices; ensuring access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities; and, Universal Designs for Learning

- dissemination of information on responsible inclusive practices through a district-wide newsletter, MDCPS website, professional networking opportunities, online courses, Teachers' Choice Instructional videos, National Inclusive Schools Week, and the ESE discussion board
- staff training on the use of peer mentoring/buddy programs such as "Yes I Can" and school-wide peer tutoring.

District staff reported that 229 schools had received training in the All Students All Schools Initiative by the time of this verification visit. Twenty-eight of the 52 staff members interviewed reported attending All Students All Schools Initiative training, including school administrators, ESE teachers, and general education teachers. All reported that the training was informative and helpful. Most of the staff interviewed reported that additional inclusion training would be beneficial not only to the teachers who have not had training, but also for the teachers who have had training as a refresher course.

In order to encourage and facilitate the implementation on inclusive practices, the district provided financial grants to schools that applied and met specific criteria. These "mini-grants" were reported by all schools as a tool they have found helpful, as they are permitted to use it for any need they have other than for benefited personnel. Schools utilized the grants to assist in providing additional in-school training initiatives, classroom materials, hourly wage para-professionals, and substitute teachers to enable more teachers to get inclusion training.

Additionally, school staff was asked about specific training on accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. Twenty-nine staff members reported attending district provided training on accommodations and modifications. Eight additional staff members reported attending trainings at their schools regarding accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.

The district has fulfilled the requirements of its system improvement plan regarding staff training and knowledge. MDCPS is encouraged to continue incorporating its provision of staff development activities for new and veteran staff into its continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities to ensure that the positive effects of recent initiatives are expanded and maintained.

Placement

This section includes information related to the continuum of placements available for students with disabilities to ensure placement in the least restrictive environment. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the area of placement were related to the students with cognitive and/or emotional disabilities having little or no interaction with nondisabled peers and high and middle school students enrolled in ESE-only sections of general curriculum courses. Many of these students were served at the separate class level (60% of more of the school day in ESE classes) even though the instruction in those classes often mirrored general education classes. Strategies implemented through the system improvement plan designed to address the area of placement included the following:

- increase the number of middle and high school students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes by targeting schools to participate in the district's All Students All Schools Initiative
- continue to review and revise the strategies implemented through the district's continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities, which focuses on increasing the proportion of students with disabilities in regular class placement.

District staff reported that 877 middle and high school students with disabilities in the target schools were moved from ESE sections of general education courses to general education courses with in-class or consultative support. These changes were facilitated through the grants and training related to the All Students All Schools initiative.

Interviews with school level staff revealed that most schools have increased the number of co-teaching or other inclusionary classes over the last two years. One elementary school was completely inclusive with no separate class settings. One high school has one-fifth of the students with disabilities included for all classes and activities, while another high school had increased inclusion classes from two in 2000-2001 to 11 this year in five different subject areas. One middle school reported having 72% of the students with disabilities served at the regular class level (spending 80% or more of the school day with nondisabled peers).

Staff reported that co-teaching is the primary inclusion model utilized at the schools visited. Additional models included support facilitation, consultation, and collaboration. Some ESE teachers reported that additional staff would increase their abilities to include more students in the general education classrooms. The leading barrier to inclusion as reported by the staff interviewed is overcoming the concerns of general education teachers regarding the resources required to support ESE students in their classrooms and their ability to adjust to having ESE teachers as instructional participants in their classrooms.

The district has fulfilled the requirements of its system improvement plan regarding placement. MDCPS is encouraged to continue to incorporate the All Students All Schools initiative in its continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities to ensure that the all students with disabilities in the district are provided instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Curriculum and Instruction

This section includes information related to the curriculum provided to students with disabilities, including the manner in which students are prepared for participation in the general statewide assessment. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the areas of curriculum and instruction included: information regarding instructional accommodations indicated on the IEP was not consistently provided to the general education teachers of the students with a disability; accommodations appeared to be applied categorically or across all ESE students rather than individualized. Strategies implemented through the system improvement plan to address the areas of curriculum and instruction included the following:

- dissemination of an administrative memorandum mandating a systematic method for ESE teachers or designated persons to share information with general education teachers regarding instructional adaptations identified on the IEPs

- provision of training in a variety of programs and methods designed to provide effective instruction based on the individual needs of the students (see Staff Training and Knowledge above)

MDCPS district staff reported that its self-review of targeted schools revealed that 90% of schools are providing the individualized accommodations as indicated on students' IEPs. In addition, 90% of the teachers at the targeted schools have received training and are providing individualized accommodations. The record reviews confirmed that IEP accommodations reflect individualization based on the student's needs.

The district has substantially fulfilled the requirements of its system improvement plan regarding curriculum and instruction. MDCPS is required to target compliance with state and federal requirements related to the provision of instructional accommodations in its continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities to ensure that the all students with disabilities in the district are provided accommodations based on individual needs.

Behavior/Discipline

This section includes information related to classroom management as well as to implementation of school or district discipline policies. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the areas of behavior and discipline were related to inconsistent implementation of functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavioral intervention plans (BIPs). Strategies implemented through the system improvement plan designed to address the areas of behavior and discipline included the following:

- implementation of an ESE Suspension and Expulsion Work Group to review secondary ESE suspensions and work with school administrators to provide strategies to reduce the number of suspensions
- dissemination of information on the implementation of BIPs, utilizing the Exceptional Student Education/Office of Information Technology (ESE/OIT) Suspension Report
- provision of initial or introductory Functional Assessment of Behavior (FAB) trainings to teachers and other pertinent personnel
- provision of FAB refresher trainings stressing implementation of BIPs to teachers and other pertinent personnel.

The District reported an increase in the number of days of suspension from the 2002-2003 to the 2003-2004 school year; however, a Suspension Strategy Improvement Team was organized to review suspension data and determine causes, patterns and trends in suspensions. The data was then utilized to develop a suspension intervention guide which offers realistic strategies and effective interventions to suspension for teachers and school administrators. Additionally, Robin J. Morrison, Instructional Supervisor, designed FAB and BIP checklists for school and regional staff to use when reviewing procedural applications of FABs and BIPs. A random selection of 20 student records having FABs and BIPs revealed 18 of the 20 has documentation that procedures were followed to implement FABs and develop BIPs accordingly.

The implementation of school-wide Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) Programs at several middle schools and a center school has had a positive impact on suspension rates at the schools involved. School staff at Palm Springs Middle School, a PBS school, was enthusiastic about the changes being made through implementation of the PBS program at their school. Teachers

reported feeling more empowered for discipline and behavioral issues in the classroom while having concrete motivational items available to work with the students exhibiting discipline or behavioral issues.

The district has substantially fulfilled the requirements of its system improvement plan regarding behavior and discipline. MDCPS is required to target compliance with state and federal requirements related to functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans in its continuous improvement plan for students with disabilities to ensure that the all students with disabilities in the district are provided the positive behavioral supports needed to foster placement in the least restrictive environment.

Student Record Reviews

This section refers to findings resulting from the compliance reviews conducted by Bureau staff. During the 2002 monitoring visit the following findings required funds adjustments:

- the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) was not current on the day of review
- the IEP was not current during the last FTE survey
- the IEP was not current during the last count for federal funding
- the student did not have a current IEP at the beginning of the school year
- the parent did not attend the IEP meeting and there is not evidence that the parent was invited to the IEP meeting
- the parent was not provided with prior written notice of a change of placement
- the parent did not provide informed consent prior to the district conducting additional testing or reevaluation
- lack of a transition plan for a student who is age 16 or older.

Findings from 2002 that required the IEP team to reconvene included:

- the IEP was not current on the day of the review
- the parent did not attend the IEP meeting and there is no evidence that the parent was invited to the meeting
- there was no transition plan for a student who is 16 or older
- the majority of the annual goals were not measurable.

Strategies implemented through the system improvement plan designed to address these compliance elements included the following:

- provision of training opportunities addressing these concerns for school administrators and teachers through Florida Diagnostic Learning and Resource System (FDLRS) in-services sessions, Management Academy workshops, and Teacher's Choice instructional videos.

Thirty-two IEP team meetings were reconvened to correct areas of non-compliance. Regional staffing specialist randomly selected two IEPs from each school and completed the Bureau Focused Monitoring Work Papers IEP Protocol to conduct compliance reviews of the IEPs. In addition, Joanne Rosen, District Educational Specialist, randomly selected 50 IEPs for district review; 46 of the 50 (92%) records reviewed met compliance standards.

During the on-site visit, Bureau staff reviewed 34 student records specifically related to IEP compliance. Eleven records reviewed revealed noncompliance that resulted in funds adjustments. The areas of noncompliance and the number of records affected were as follows:

- lack of informed notice of change of placement (10)
- lack of parent notice for the IEP meeting (1)

The record reviews resulted in the requirement for ten IEP teams to reconvene due to the following:

- lack of measurable goals (9)
- lack of parent notice for the IEP meeting (1)

The IEP reviews revealed five areas of findings that were systemic in nature. To be found systemic in nature, 25% of records (eight of the 34 IEPs reviewed) had to be found out of compliance for the same item. Items of noncompliance found to be systemic were as follows:

- lack of measurable goals
- lack of benchmarks containing required time frames for completion
- lack of location for specially designed instruction (special education services)
- lack of statement indicating how parents will be informed of student progress
- lack of prior written notice for change of placement

Identifying information for the students requiring reconvening of the IEP teams and students for whom fund adjustments will be required, and the reasons for those corrective actions, were provided in a letter to the district dated December 22, 2004.

In addition to the review of IEPs, six matrixes of service documents were reviewed. The services identified on the matrix must be supported by the needs of the student and the services documented on the IEP, and must be in evidence in the classroom. The matrix of services documents were found to be unsupported for three of the records reviewed. The district will be required to correct the data for those students through the Automated Student Information System database for surveys 2 and 3 for the 2004-05 school year. The names and student numbers of the students for whom data must be corrected were provided in the aforementioned letter.

The district has made significant progress in many of the specific compliance areas targeted as a result of the focused monitoring visit conducted in 2002. However, selected areas require continued attention. The following elements must be incorporated into the district's continuous improvement monitoring plan as a general compliance target. Some of these elements may be addressed through the forms revisions, while others will require staff training and progress monitoring:

- development of compliant annual goals, including short term objectives or benchmarks
- location of specially designed instruction (e.g., general education classroom, ESE classroom or therapy room, school campus)
- inclusion of all required components related to reporting of progress
- provision of prior written notice of change of placement
- accurate reporting of matrix of services levels

- development of fully compliant forms to document procedures related to services to exceptional education students.

District Forms Review

This section refers to forms used by the district to document a variety of processes and procedures related to the provision of services to exceptional students. Findings from the 2002 monitoring report in the area of the forms included required revisions to two forms and also included recommendations for two forms. District staff, including regional staffing specialists, district staffing specialists, and district administrators collaborated with Bureau personnel regarding forms revisions.

As part of this verification visit, forms representing the thirteen areas identified below were submitted to Bureau staff for a review to determine compliance with federal and state laws. Seven forms require revisions to be in compliance with federal requirements, and recommendations were made for eight of the forms. The district was notified of the specific findings via a separate letter dated November 18, 2004.

- *Parent Notification of Individual Education Plan (IEP) Meeting*
- *IEP forms**+
- *EP forms*
- *Notice and Consent for Initial Placement**+
- *Informed Notice and Consent for Evaluation*+
- *Informed Notice and Consent for Reevaluation*+
- *Notification of Change of Placement**+
- *Notification of Change of FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education)**+
- *Informed Notice of Refusal**+
- *Documentation of Staffing/Eligibility Determination*+
- *Informed Notice of Dismissal**
- *Notice: Not Eligible for Exceptional Student Placement**
- *Summary of Procedural Safeguards*
- *Annual Notice of Confidentiality*

*indicates findings that require immediate attention

+indicates finding that are recommended for review

Additional Compliance

In addition to monitoring categories related to the 2002 final report, the Bureau also investigated the provision of counseling as a related service, the way in which the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech impaired or language impaired are addressed, and secondary school to post-school transition planning for students with disabilities.

Regarding the provision of counseling as a related service to ESE students, it was reported that the district provides counseling through a variety of sources, and that such services are funded by the district and documented on the IEP. During the on-site visits, records of students served in the programs for students who are emotionally handicapped (EH) or severely emotionally disturbed (SED) were reviewed specifically to determine if counseling was documented as a related service on the IEP. Counseling as a related service was evident on 163 of the 187 IEPs

reviewed (87%). In addition, the majority of school-level staff interviewed (67%) reported that the counseling needs of all students are considered at the IEP meeting.

Regarding the communication needs of students with disabilities, interviews and record reviews provided evidence that the communication needs of students who do not meet the eligibility requirements for the programs for students who are speech impaired (SI) or language impaired (LI) are addressed by the ESE teacher, often in consultation with the speech/language pathologist (SLP). The manner in which this would be documented on the IEP was inconsistently reported by staff from different schools. Some indicated that goals would be written in the communication domain, some indicated that communication would be a related service provided by the ESE teacher with consultation from the SLP, and yet others reported this would be documented as an accommodation on the IEP. There was evidence of communication goals for students not eligible as SI or LI in records reviewed during the on-site visit and there were no findings of noncompliance related to identified communication needs not being addressed.

Transition planning for students with disabilities moving from school to post-school living also was addressed during this monitoring visit. It was reported that the district has transition (career) specialists who are responsible for the agency representative participation and information at the IEP meetings. Both the Vocational Rehabilitation and Developmental Disabilities agencies were reported as being very supportive during transition IEP meetings. All of the high schools visited reported having projects/programs with local technical schools to assist with transition needs. In addition, North Miami Beach High School's "Starbuck's Café" and "Kinko's" printing operations represented exemplary transition programs. Seven of the records reviewed on-site were transition IEPs. There were no findings of noncompliance related to transition planning in the transition IEPs reviewed. Four of the seven transition IEPs included agency representation, documented through attendance at the meeting or through other information provided by the agency.

Summary

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services conducted a verification monitoring visit to Miami-Dade County Public Schools on October 13 – 15, 2004. The visit served to verify that the district had substantially met the requirements of the system improvement plan developed as a result of the focused monitoring visit in September 2002, and to demonstrate the district's continued efforts and improvement in a variety of areas related to exceptional student education. Additional areas investigated during this verification visit that were not addressed during the 2002 visit included the provision of counseling, including psychological counseling as a related service, the way in which the communication needs of students not eligible for programs for students who are speech impaired or language impaired are addressed, and secondary school to post-school transition planning for students with disabilities.

Areas in which additional or continued corrective actions are required must be addressed in the district's continuous improvement plan. The district's continuous improvement plan, with specific dates for completion determined in collaboration with the Bureau, must be revised to incorporate continued intervention and monitoring of the following:

- provision of instructional accommodations designed to meet the individual needs of students
- compliance with requirements related to functional behavior assessments and behavioral intervention plans
- development of compliant annual goals, including short term objectives or benchmarks
- location of specially designed instruction (e.g., general education classroom, ESE classroom or therapy room, school campus)
- inclusion of all required components related to reporting of progress
- provision of prior written notice of change of placement
- accurate reporting of matrix of services levels
- development of fully compliant forms to document procedures related to services to exceptional education students.

Through a district presentation by Brucie Ball, Cathy Orlando, Debbie Karch, Diedre Marshall, Aurora Vaccaro, Roni Bader-Tables, Timothy Andexler, Robin Morrison, and various regional and school level personnel, and on-site visits to multiple elementary, middle and high schools, the district demonstrated improvement in all areas. While the district has completed the strategies of the system improvement plan resulting from the 2002 monitoring report, the district must submit a final status report in June 2005 related to this plan. The revision to the continuous improvement plan will serve to ensure that the district will continue to meet the requirements of the provision of services to exceptional education students.