2016-17 Exceptional Student Education On-Site Monitoring Report

DeSoto County School District December 7-9, 2016



This publication is produced through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), Division of K-12 Public Schools, Florida Department of Education (FDOE), and is available online at http://www.fldoe.org/ese/mon-home.asp. For information on available resources, contact the BEESS Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

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Authority

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE), Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), in carrying out its roles of leadership, resource allocation, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation, is required to oversee the performance of district school boards in the enforcement of all exceptional student education (ESE) laws (sections 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, the FDOE has established district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of restraint and seclusion. These standards are included in each district's Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures (SP&P) document.

ESE On-Site Monitoring Process

Background Information

The 2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring 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 more than 10 days in a school year for children with IEPs.
 - B. Percentage of districts that have (a) a significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rates of suspensions and expulsions of more than 10 days for children with IEPs; and (b) policies, procedures or practices that contribute to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and support, and procedural safeguards.
- Indicator 5 Educational environments:

Percentage of children with IEPs aged 6 through 21:

- A. In the regular class 80 percent or more of the day;
- B. In the regular class less than 40 percent of the day; and
- C. In separate schools, residential facilities or homebound/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 through Grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in kindergarten through Grade 3) who are not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral 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 occur in advance of the initial on-site visit to the school district.
- Phase 2 is the initial on-site visit to the selected school district by the state support team (SST).
- Phase 3 is follow-up activities, which are conducted by a designated follow-up team, as determined by the SST, and identification of the ongoing data that will be collected.
- Phase 4 is evaluation of the effectiveness of how the district is addressing each of the focus areas, and should include participation of the action-planning and problem-solving process team.

In a letter dated September 19, 2016, the superintendent of the DeSoto County School District was informed that BEESS would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: graduation rate, dropout rate, least restrictive environment and concerns regarding low math scores for middle-grades students with disabilities.

School Selection

Upon review of the school district's data, it was determined that the on-site monitoring visit would involve the following schools for school-level administrator, teacher, parent and student focus groups and school walk-through debriefings:

- West Elementary School
- DeSoto Middle School
- DeSoto County High School

On-Site Activities

On-Site Visit Team

The following SST members planned or conducted the on-site monitoring visit:

FDOE, BEESS

- Judy White, Program Director, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Lead
- Wendy Metty, Program Specialist, Instructional Support Services

Peer Monitor

• Tanya English, ESE, Director, Wakulla County School District

FDOE, BEESS Discretionary Projects

- Federico Valadez, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network
- Deanne Cowley, Central Regional Coordinator, Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Jennifer Fitzgerald, Project Manager, Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET)
- Kathy Mathis, Coordinator, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System Associate Centers (FDLRS)
- Stephanie Moreo, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Janice Creneti, Assistant Project Manager, State Personnel Development Grant

Data Collection

On-site monitoring activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session with district and school-level staff 23 participants
- Administrator focus groups 18 participants
- Teacher focus groups 23 participants
- Parent focus group seven participants
- Student focus groups 16 participants
- School walk-through debriefings 21 classrooms
- Action-planning and problem-solving process 28 participants

The district completed the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with FIN facilitators on March 22, 2016, and included the following goals:

- Goal 1: During the 2016-17 school year, the district will increase least restrictive environment (LRE) to match or exceed the current state average for regular class placement (73 percent).
- Goal 2: Create a district awareness of the concerns with transportation.
- Goal 3: District will implement an articulation process for students with disabilities transitioning from Grade 5 to Grade 6 to maintain placement in the LRE.

2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring Results

The following data are related to the focus areas and activities for the 2016-17 ESE On-Site Monitoring for the DeSoto County School District.

Graduation Rate

The federal uniform high school graduation rate for students with disabilities is calculated by taking the number of first-time ninth graders from four years ago, plus the number of incoming transfer students on the same schedule to graduate, minus the number of 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 for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year is 33.3 percent, which is below the state target of 56.3 percent. The graduation rate for the 2015-16 school year increased to 37.1 percent, which is below the state target of 58.3 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
DeSoto	51.6%	33.3%	37.1%
State Target	54.3%	56.3%	58.3%

Dropout Rate

The federal dropout rate for students with disabilities is calculated by taking the number of students who exited special education as a result of dropping out, divided by the number of students who graduated with a regular high school diploma, special diploma, certificate of completion, special certificate of completion, dropped out or died. The district's federal dropout rate for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year is 54.2 percent, which is above the state target of 15.1 percent. The dropout rate for the 2015-16 school year decreased to 34.4 percent, which is above the state target of 13.4 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
DeSoto	23.2%	54.2%	34.4%
State Target	16.8%	15.1%	13.4%

Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with nondisabled students. These LRE data are calculated by dividing the number of students with disabilities aged 6 through 21 served in the regular class for 80 percent or more of the day, by the total number of students with disabilities aged 6 through 21 reported in October (survey 2). These data do not include parentally placed private school students or students served in Florida county jails, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice facilities or Florida Department of Corrections. The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class for the 2014-15 school year is 81.7 percent, which is above the state target of 77.0 percent. The district's LRE rate for the 2015-16 school year decreased to 71.8 percent, which is below the state target of 79.0 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
DeSoto	84.7%	81.7%	71.8%
State Target	74.0%	77.0%	79.0%

Math Scores for Middle-Grades Students with Disabilities

Percentage of Students with Disabilities Scoring Level Three and Above in Middle-Grades Math

After reviewing state assessment data trends for the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA), BEESS identified students with disabilities in middle-grades math as an area in critical need of support. BEESS established a tiered criteria in order to provide needed supports for middle-grades math in each district (Grades 6-8) in order to increase the number of students with disabilities scoring level three and above and close the gap between all students and students with disabilities.

FSA Scores of Level Three and Above in Middle-Grades Math	2014-15	2015-16
DeSoto		
Percent of Students with Disabilities	10.9%	6.7%
Percent of Nondisabled Students	33.7%	28.4%
State		
State Average of Students with Disabilities 22.7% 21.0%		21.0%
State Target for Students with Disabilities	51.0%	56.0%

Interviews Conducted

Administrator Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with administrators from West Elementary School, DeSoto Middle School and DeSoto County High School regarding graduation, dropout, LRE and low math scores for middle-grades students with disabilities.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- Data are used well at the middle and high school levels to track progress toward graduation.
- Administrators are working to increase the graduation rate and are providing dropout prevention for all students.
- To improve math scores and graduation and dropout rates, the following instructional practices and initiatives have been selected for implementation:
 - Use of the Strategic Instruction Method, Check & Connect and Advancement Via Individual Determination.
 - Coaches for graduation, math and English language arts (ELA) are in place.
 - The district is beginning to use Project 10's early warning color-coding system to predict and increase graduation success.
 - Counselors are reviewing student's progress toward the requirements for graduation on a regular basis.

- A new High School High Tech program is in place and provides students with the opportunity to explore jobs and postsecondary programs.
- A flexible co-teaching and support facilitation model is being used in the high school to meet the needs of all students with disabilities.
- Professional development on flexible scheduling has been provided by FIN and a district services plan for the district's BPIE is in place.
- Math teachers have professional learning communities in middle school and use iReady and IXL software programs to support math and ELA learning.
- Turnover in leadership, teachers and counselors has been substantial in the past several years.
- Many students arrive at school (all levels):
 - Not academically prepared to succeed
 - With significant gaps in foundational math knowledge
 - With gaps in skills in transition from elementary to middle school
 - Overage because of being retained multiple years
- Students from migrant-farm-worker communities are often behind in credits because of going to schools in states with different requirements and frequently leaving school for economic reasons, such as to help support their family.

Teacher Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with teachers from West Elementary School, DeSoto Middle School and DeSoto County High School regarding graduation, dropout, LRE and low math scores for middle-grades students with disabilities.

Themes that emerged from these focus groups included the following:

- There is interest in inquiring and learning more about both specific disabilities and the instruction of students with disabilities, access courses and math content.
- Some veteran teachers feel that the professional development provided is repetitive and is geared for new teachers.
- Not all teachers feel supportive of the inclusion of students with disabilities in general
 education classrooms and some general education teachers feel that they do not have
 enough knowledge or support to offer the services and specialized instruction required by
 students with disabilities.
- It was suggested that additional support for reading is needed for complex word problems in math.
- Student absenteeism is an issue and the attendance policy at the high school is not effective.
- Teachers believe that the reason students drop out is to work and earn money for the family.
- Teacher turnover at the school level is problematic.
- Students are not sufficiently prepared when transitioning to the next school level.
- ESE teachers have high caseloads and little planning time.
- Teacher report that working longer hours is necessary in order to meet expectations.

Parent Focus Group

Members of the SST conducted a focus group with parents of students with disabilities aged 14 years or older regarding LRE and low middle-grades math scores.

Themes that emerged from the focus group included the following:

- Parents are pleased with how students are progressing in high school.
- Mentoring programs are very helpful to students.
- More vocational rehabilitation assistance and career and technical education courses are needed as students find them helpful.
- Some teachers provide after-school tutoring, but there are students that cannot participate because of a lack of transportation.
- Some parents find it difficult to assist students with math homework.
- Some parents feel that students need help with self-advocacy because of bullying issues.
- Information regarding educating students with disabilities and secondary transition is lacking.

Student Focus Groups

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with students from DeSoto Middle School and DeSoto County High School. Students were asked to share their perspectives on topics such as graduation, dropout and post-school activities.

Comments from these focus groups included the following:

- All of the students could identify an adult at the school who they could turn to for support.
- The atmosphere in the middle school has improved this year and students feel more support.
- In-school suspension is preferable to out-of-school suspension because students are able to complete school work during in-school suspension.
- The use of Cornell notes is very helpful (Advancement Via Individual Determination strategy).
- More math tutoring is needed.
- Most of the middle school students are not aware of their IEP.
- With prompting, most students could identify some accommodations they receive but were not familiar with the term.

School Walk-Through Debriefings

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at West Elementary School, DeSoto Middle School and DeSoto County High School regarding student engagement, school climate, and evidence of academic and behavioral expectations.

Observations from the school walk-through debriefings included the following:

- Schools and classrooms are clean and well organized.
- Academic and behavioral expectations are consistently posted.
- The atmospheres of the schools are positive and the students and staff are fully engaged in teaching and learning.
- A variety of instructional activities including small-group instruction, educational games and peer-to-peer instruction are being utilized.
- Use of technology, such as Chrome books, laptops and SMART Boards was evident.
- A separate class for students with disabilities at the high school is located in a portable that does not have a covered walkway for access to the main school building. It appeared that the ramp to the portable could be challenging to use in bad weather. District administrative staff have plans to move this class into the main building.

Commendations

- 1. During the problem-solving process, district- and school-level staff demonstrated a firm understanding of the barriers they face in improving the graduation rate, the dropout rate and middle-grades math scores and are committed to improvement.
- 2. At the middle and high schools visited, data are being used well. For example, "data chats" are held with students at the middle school level and the district is using Project 10's early warning color-coding system. There was evidence that goals are focused and shared instructional practices are being implemented and monitored.

2016-17 Next Steps

	Next Steps
Graduation Rate	
Summary	The graduation rate for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year is 33.3 percent, which is below the state target of 56.3 percent. The graduation rate for the 2015-16 school year is 37.1 percent, which is an increase but is below the state target of 58.3 percent.
Recommendations	The district should ensure that teachers and administrators are aware of the discretionary projects and the training and professional development offered by these projects, including online training, to help students graduate on time.
Required Actions	The district must continue the problem-solving process that was started during the monitoring visit, set goals and develop action plans specific to improving the graduation rate.
	In addition, the district must continue collaborating with Project 10 on the early warning color-coding system to determine which students need interventions in order to graduate. The district must develop interventions and activities for struggling students, and include who is responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions and activities are made available to students.
	 The district must provide the following documentation: A list of goals and related action plans and A list of interventions and activities for struggling students, and the name and title of the person responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions and activities are made available to students.
	This documentation must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org by the following dates: • May 1, 2017 • November 1, 2017
Dropout Rate	
Summary	The federal dropout rate for students with disabilities for the 2014-15 school year is 54.2 percent and the rate for the 2015-16 school year is 34.4 percent. Although this is a significant decrease, it is above the

	state target of 13.4 percent.	
Recommendations	The district should make efforts to locate and recover students who have already dropped out of school during the 2016-17 school year.	
Required Actions	See required actions for graduation.	
Educational Environ	nment (Least Restrictive Environment)	
Summary	The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class in the 2014-15 school year is 81.7 percent, which is above the state target of 77.0 percent. The district's LRE rate for the 2015-16 school year decreased to 71.8 percent, which is below the state target of 79.0 percent.	
Recommendations	The district should prioritize response to intervention training and technical assistance at the elementary school.	
	The district should provide professional development on the value of inclusive education for students with disabilities and on effective models of support facilitation and co-teaching.	
Required Actions	 The district must continue activities articulated in their BPIE and provide a report on these activities to the district's BEESS liaison via BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org by August 4, 2017. The documentation must include a detailed summary of the activities and dates held, and a list of attendees (including name and title) for each of the following: Collaborate with FIN on facilitating the inclusive scheduling process with targeted schools and determine next steps for implementation. Collect transportation data for students with disabilities and analyze individual school transportation schedules to identify instructional time loss in order to increase awareness and determine next steps. Collaborate with FIN on transition from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in order to maintain placement in the LRE and determine if further supports are needed. 	
Math Scores for Middle-Grades Students with Disabilities		
Summary	Math scores for middle school students with disabilities have decreased from 10.9 percent of students scoring a level three or above in the 2014-15 school year to 6.7 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is below the state target of 56.0 percent.	
Recommendations	 It is recommended that the district consider the following actions: Utilize a team problem-solving approach and identify barriers to student success in middle-grades math courses including, e.g., steps to ensure quality instruction, supports and interventions for students with disabilities in middle-grades math courses. Ensure that students with disabilities are in the correct math classes and are receiving accurate accommodations according to their IEPs. Collaborate with discretionary project staff (e.g., FDLRS and PS:Rtl) to provide training and technical assistance to math teachers (e.g., new teachers and out-of-field teachers). 	

	In addition, when the FSA and end-of-course math scores for the 2016-17 school year are available, the district should review and analyze the data results. The district should continue to monitor student progress for middle-grades math students during the 2017-18 school year and consider additional professional development if the scores have not improved.
Required Actions	None.
Phase 4 of the ESE	Monitoring Process
Summary	The DeSoto County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas related to students with disabilities: Graduation rate Dropout rate Least restrictive environment Concerns regarding low math scores for middle-grades students
Required Action	By November 15, 2017 , designated BEESS staff and members of the district problem-solving team will reconvene via a conference call to share how they are addressing each of the above-mentioned focus areas and determine next steps. The district will coordinate with BEESS regarding the date and time of the conference call and provide documentation (e.g., recent data, professional development, problem-solving notes and action plans) to BEESS by November 8, 2017 .

Technical Assistance

- Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (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 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.
- The district's SP&P document provides district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual, physical, or mechanical restraint and seclusion developed by FDOE. The school district's document for the 2015-16 through 2017-18 school years may be accessed at http://beess.fcim.org/sppDistrictDocSearch.aspx.
- 3. The 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 https://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 with 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, which draws from emerging research and best practices;
 - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources**, which indexes federal technical assistance and other resources: and
 - Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations, which catalogs state laws and regulations related to school discipline.
- 5. The Project 10: Transition Education Network (http://project10.info) assists Florida school districts and relevant stakeholders in building capacity to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve their academic success and post-school outcomes. Project 10 serves as the primary conduit between BEESS and school-district personnel in addressing law and policy, effective practices, and research-based interventions in the area of transition services for youth with disabilities. The project also supports transition initiatives developed through the BEESS Strategic Plan. Examples of assistance provided related to graduation rates include using school-level data for graduation success, technical assistance to improve data collection, analysis, and data-driven decision making, in order to develop a color-coded student graduation tracking system that can be coordinated with existing initiatives or systems. Regarding dropout, the

- project supports dropout prevention strategies for students with disabilities, school-based enterprise, service learning, and early warning system.
- 6. FDLRS Associate Centers Support may be accessed at http://www.fdlrs.org. The 19 FDLRS associate centers provide an array of instructional and technical support services to school districts statewide. The four central functions of each FDLRS center are Child Find, parent services, human resource development, and professional learning and technology. The centers collaborate with districts, agency and support personnel, communities, families, and educational personnel providing support services for educators, school administrators, parents, and students with disabilities. Examples of professional development related to graduation rates include Florida standards/access points, differentiated instruction, access to the general curriculum, Strategic Instruction Model, behavior/discipline, Standing up for Me, self-advocacy, responsive classroom, and district specific supports. Professional development related to dropout include differentiated instruction, accommodations, CHAMPs, Tough Kids, discipline in the secondary classroom, support for parent involvement, Professional Development Alternatives for Positive Behavior Support module, universal design for learning, small-group planning and problem solving, disability awareness, and district specific supports.
- 7. **PS:Rtl Technology** may be accessed at http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html. One function of this project provides support to regional technology coordinators and technology specialists to effectively implement accessible instructional materials, assistive technologies, learning technologies, and universal design for learning principles within all tiers of instruction. This project also manages, coordinates and supports the regional assistive technology loan libraries.
- 8. **SEDNET** may be accessed at http://www.sednetfl.info/. The 19 regional SEDNET centers assist Florida school districts and relevant stakeholders in building capacity to provide the necessary mental health and academic supports to students with or at risk of emotional and behavioral disabilities to prepare students to achieve academic success; graduate high school; and become career, college and life ready.
- 9. The PS/Rtl Technology and Learning Connections (TLC) may be accessed at http://www.tlc-mtss.com. TLC provides guidelines and resources to support the implementation of universal design for learning. A quarterly newsletter that focuses on technology integration to support the local development of highly effective classrooms for all students may also be accessed. TLC's Winter 2016-17 newsletter focuses on math instruction, resources and tools to eliminate barriers and increase achievement for all students and can be viewed at http://conta.cc/2kjsuGt. To sign-up to receive this quarterly newsletter, please visit http://bit.ly/1TLoHLQ. Additional resources are available at http://www.tlc-mtss.com/resources.html.

State Support Team for DeSoto County School District

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