

**2016-17 Exceptional Student Education  
On-Site Monitoring Report**

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**Hardee County School District  
November 8-10, 2016**



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

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**Florida Department of Education  
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

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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 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 Hardee 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 (LRE) 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 process would involve the following schools for school administrator, teacher, parent and student focus groups and school walk-through debriefings:

- Wauchula Elementary School
- Hardee Junior High School
- Hardee Senior High School

## **On-Site Activities**

### **On-Site Visit Team**

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

#### **FDOE, BEESS**

- Monica Verra-Tirado, State Director for Special Education, Bureau Chief
- Karrie Musgrove, Program Specialist, Instructional Support Services, Lead
- Aimee Kowalczyk, Parent Services, BEESS Resource and Information Center

#### **Peer Monitor**

- Donnita Butorac, ESE Director, Holmes County School District

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

- Lisa Yount, Facilitator, Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:Rtl)
- Tracy Dasher, Project Manager, Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET)
- Poinsetta Tillman, Program Coordinator, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) Associate Centers
- Bonnie Dupuis, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Federico Valadez, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network
- Margaret Sullivan, Director, State Personnel Development Grant

### **Data Collection**

On-site monitoring activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- Welcome session with district and school administrators and staff – 19 participants
- Administrator focus groups – 23 participants
- Teacher focus groups – 27 participants
- Parent focus group – four participants
- Student focus groups – 20 participants
- School walk-through debriefings – 15+ classrooms
- Action-planning and problem-solving process – 22 participants

The district's initial Best Practices for Inclusive Education dated October 14, 2014, was revised on December 13, 2016, and included the following goal:

- Provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance to school leadership teams on the implementation of the flexible scheduling process and collaborative teaching service delivery models in order to provide instruction and support to all students with disabilities in the general education context so that in 2017 schools will show an increase in regular class placement and a decrease in separate class placement.

### **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 Hardee 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 36.8 percent, which is below the state target of 56.3 percent. The graduation rate for the 2015-16 school year increased to 41.2 percent, which is below the state target of 58.3 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Hardee	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>41.2%</b>
State Target	<b>54.3%</b>	<b>56.3%</b>	<b>58.3%</b>

**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 44.4 percent, which is above the state target of 15.1 percent. The dropout rate for the 2015-16 school year decreased to 23.5 percent, which is above the state target of 13.4 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Hardee	<b>36.0%</b>	<b>44.4%</b>	<b>23.5%</b>
State Target	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>

**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 71.1 percent, which is below the state target of 77.0 percent. The district’s LRE rate for the 2015-16 school year increased to 72.2 percent, which is below the state target of 79.0 percent.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Hardee	<b>69.6%</b>	<b>71.1%</b>	<b>72.2%</b>
State Target	<b>74.0%</b>	<b>77.0%</b>	<b>79.0%</b>



**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 Standard 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 below level three and closing the gap between all students and students with disabilities.

FSA Scores of Level Three and Above in Middle-Grades Math	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Hardee</b>		
Percent of Students with Disabilities	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>
Percent of Nondisabled Students	<b>38.4%</b>	<b>42.7%</b>
<b>State</b>		
State Average of Students with Disabilities	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>21.0%</b>
State Target for Students with Disabilities	<b>51.0%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>

**Interviews Conducted**

**Administrator Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with administrators from Wauchula Elementary School, Hardee Junior High School and Hardee Senior 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:

- The administration is open to growth and displayed a willingness to learn from the monitoring experience.
- Differentiated instruction in all content areas is an identified area of need.
- Vertical alignment curriculum is an identified area that could be improved in order for students to be ready for the next grade.
- Service delivery needs to be more consistent, with a common understanding of service models at all schools.
- In the area of discipline, administrators are seeking preventative and supportive strategies to minimize discipline concerns.
- Some administrators expressed concerns with the lack of support students had at home for math homework. Many students also had skill gaps in middle school.

**Teacher Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with teachers from Wauchula Elementary School, Hardee Junior High School and Hardee Senior 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 a strong commitment to provide effective instruction to students.
- Additional training on differentiated instruction within a multi-tiered system of support is desired.
- A better understanding of a full continuum of service models and providing appropriate models of services to fit the needs of their students is desired.
- There are concerns for the ineffectiveness of the discipline policy, as students preferred suspension.
- There are concerns that the attendance policy of credit denial because of poor attendance did not improve attendance rates.
- Some barriers to math success that were noted are lack of support from home, lack of homework completion, class sizes too large to give the students the support they need and the majority of students with disabilities are in general education classes that contain students who are in the lowest quartile for achievement.

### **Parent Focus Group**

Members of the SST conducted a focus group with parents of students with disabilities aged 14 years and older at Hardee Senior High School regarding postsecondary transition.

Themes that emerged from the focus group included the following:

- The opportunity to provide input was appreciated and a mechanism for continued feedback is desired.
- There are concerns about ineffective discipline policies, as removing students from class does not improve the behavior at school.
- There are concerns that the attendance policy of credit denial because of poor attendance did not improve student attendance.
- More academic supports, including homework help, are desired.
- The importance of education is strongly supported.

### **Student Focus Groups**

Members of the SST conducted focus groups with students from Hardee Junior High School and Hardee Senior 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:

- Some students are not aware of their IEP but understand that they are eligible to receive accommodations.
- More student-centered learning and opportunities for engagement in the classroom is desired, instead of the traditional teacher-led learning model.
- The current discipline plan is not deterring unwanted behaviors.
- Access to accommodations is inconsistent, as some teachers do not provide accommodations to students as stated on their IEP.
- Students expressed that the pacing of math classes is too fast. They would like teachers to take more time to explain and give feedback in class.

## School Walk-Through Debriefings

School walk-through debriefings were conducted at Wauchula Elementary School, Hardee Junior High School and Hardee Senior High School regarding student engagement, school climate, and evidence of academic and behavioral expectations.

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

- Technology is present in spacious classrooms.
- Student work is displayed in hallways and classrooms.
- There is teacher-led instruction in the majority of the classes.
- Expectations and consequences are not consistently displayed and defined.

## Commendations

1. All stakeholders expressed a willingness to improve the district’s delivery of quality education.
2. Administrators and school leaders recognized the importance for a districtwide leadership team to address targeted areas for improvement.
3. The dropout rate for the 2014-15 school year was 44.4 percent and decreased significantly to 23.5 percent for the 2015-16 school year; however, it is still above the state target of 13.4 percent.
4. Using the color-coding strategy for tracking graduation and dropout predictors, data indicates significant improvement in the graduation and dropout rates for the 2016-17 school year.

## 2016-17 Next Steps

<b>Graduation Rate</b>	
Summary	The graduation rate of students with disabilities increased from 36.8 percent in the 2014-2015 school year to 41.2 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is below the state target of 58.3 percent.
Recommendations	The district should ensure that teachers and administrators are aware of the professional development and the online training the discretionary projects offer educators to support positive student outcomes, including graduation.
Required Actions	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The district must provide the following documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of goals and related action plans.</li> <li>• A list of interventions and activities for struggling students, and</li> </ul>

	<p>the name and title of the person responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions and activities are made available to students.</p> <p>This documentation must be provided to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>June 5, 2017</b></li> <li>• <b>November 1, 2017</b></li> </ul>
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	
Summary	The district's dropout rate decreased from 44.4 percent in the 2014-15 school year to 23.5 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is above the state target of 13.4 percent.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the district continue to monitor and track data as it continues to use the Project 10 early warning system (EWS) and participate in the follow-up activities recommended through problem solving by the district leadership team.
Required Actions	See required actions for graduation.
<b>Educational Environment (Least Restrictive Environment)</b>	
Summary	The district's LRE increased from 71.1 percent in the 2014-15 school year to 72.2 percent in the 2015-16 school year, which is below the state target of 79.0 percent.
Recommendations	<p>The district should prioritize response to intervention training and technical assistance at the elementary and middle schools.</p> <p>The district should provide professional development on the value of inclusive education, and on effective models of support facilitation and co-teaching.</p> <p>In addition, the district should continue to monitor and track data through problem solving with the district leadership team.</p>
Required Actions	The district must coordinate with FIN to provide professional development to address scheduling, inclusive practices and differentiation of instruction (to school administrators). The district must provide a detailed narrative of these activities, dates held, and a list of attendees (name and title) to the district's BEESS liaison via <a href="mailto:BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org">BEESSMonitoring@fldoe.org</a> by <b>June 5, 2017</b> .
<b>Math Scores for Middle-Grades Students with Disabilities</b>	
Summary	The district's middle-grades math proficiency scores dropped from 7.4 percent 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	<p>It is recommended that the district consider the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Ensure that students with disabilities are in the correct math</li> </ul>

	<p>classes and are receiving accurate accommodations according to their IEPs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> </ul> <p>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.</p>
Required Actions	None.
<b>Phase 4 of the ESE Monitoring Process</b>	
Summary	<p>The Hardee County School District was selected for an on-site visit for the following focus areas related to students with disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation rate</li> <li>• Dropout rate</li> <li>• Least restrictive environment</li> <li>• Concerns regarding low math scores for middle-grades students</li> </ul>
Required Actions	<p>By <b>November 8, 2017</b>, 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 <b>November 1, 2017</b>.</p>

## Technical Assistance

1. **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](http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/RTIB%20Guide%20101811_final.pdf) and provides an overview of the critical components of an MTSS for behavior. These critical components describe systems changes that are necessary for a results-driven ESE system.
2. The district's **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 EWS.

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/1TL0HLQ>. Additional resources are available at <http://www.tlc-mtss.com/resources.html>.

## State Support Team for Hardee County School District

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