

**2014-15 Exceptional Student Education
Monitoring and Assistance
On-Site Visit Report**

**Charlotte County School District
April 27-29, 2015**



This publication is produced through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), Division of Public Schools, Florida Department of Education, 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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August 6, 2015

Douglas Whittaker, Superintendent
Charlotte County School District
1445 Education Way
Port Charlotte, FL 33948-1052

Dear Superintendent Whittaker:

The Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) is pleased to provide you with the 2014-15 Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Report for Charlotte County School District. The 2014-15 monitoring process focused on reviewing progress for the action plan developed during the 2013-14 on-site visit as well as newly identified targeted areas. BEESS is committed to providing intensive supports for districts selected during the 2013-14 school year for three years of progress monitoring, of which your district was one.

The Charlotte County School District was selected as needing continued intensive supports due to incidents of restraint and seclusion, dropout rates, and least restrictive environment. The on-site visit was conducted by a State Support Team (SST) that included BEESS staff, department staff and discretionary project staff.

Multiple sources of information were integrated to develop this report including analyzing recent data and evaluating the effectiveness of the district's action plan. In addition, if determined necessary, district and school personnel were interviewed, along with classroom walk-through visits and conducting student focus groups. This process focuses on a shift from ESE compliance to outcomes to prepare all students for college and career readiness, which include: increasing standard diploma graduates; decreasing the number of students dropping out of school; increasing regular class placement; decreasing the need for seclusion and restraint; and eliminating disproportionality in eligibility identification and discipline.

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Superintendent Whittaker
August 6, 2015
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Ms. Linda Apple, Director of ESE, and her staff were very helpful to the SST in preparing for the on-site visit and throughout the visit. In addition, school-level personnel welcomed SST members and demonstrated a continued commitment to the education of students in the school district. This report will be posted on the BEESS website and may be accessed at <http://www.fldoe.org/e/se/mon-home.asp>.

Thank you for your commitment to improving services to exceptional education students in the Charlotte County School District. If there are any questions regarding this report, please contact me at 850-245-0475 or via email at monica.verra-tirado@fldoe.org.

Sincerely,

Monica Verra-Tirado, Ed.D., Chief
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Enclosure

cc: Linda Apple
Cathy Bishop
Patricia Howell
Karin Gerold

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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 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]). The bureau 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, the bureau 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, the bureau 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, particularly, but not exclusively, for children in those groups that were significantly overidentified.

Section 1003.573, F.S., Use of restraint and seclusion on students with disabilities, was created in July 2010, and established documentation, reporting and monitoring requirements for districts regarding the use of restraint and seclusion for students with disabilities. School districts were required to have policies and procedures that govern parent notification, incident reporting, data collection and monitoring of the use of restraint or seclusion for students with disabilities in place no later than January 31, 2011. In July 2011, s. 1003.573, F.S., was amended to require that the FDOE establish standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual or physical restraint and occurrences of seclusion. In September and October 2011, the standards established by the FDOE were provided to school districts and were included in the district's Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures (SP&P) document.

ESE Monitoring and Assistance Process

Background Information

The 2014-15 ESE Monitoring and Assistance 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 greater 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 rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater 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 six through 21:
 - A. Inside the regular class 80 percent or more of the day;
 - B. Inside 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 was composed of planning activities that occurred in advance of the first on-site visit to the school district.
- Phase 2 was the initial on-site visit to the selected school district by the State Support Team (SST). **This district was visited on April 16-17, 2014.**
- Phase 3 includes follow-up and post-initial visit activities that are conducted by a designated follow-up team, as determined by the SST, and identification of the ongoing data that will be collected. **This report reflects a follow-up to the 2013-14 monitoring visit.**
- Phase 4 includes evaluation of the effectiveness of the school district's action plan, and should include participation of the comprehensive team that was involved in Phase 1.

In a letter dated February 24, 2015, the superintendent of the Charlotte County School District was informed that the bureau would be conducting an on-site monitoring visit for the following focus areas: incidents of restraint and seclusion, dropout rates and least restrictive environment (LRE).

School Selection

Upon review of the school district's data it was determined that the monitoring and assistance process would involve the following schools for school-level interviews, student focus groups, and classroom walk-through visits:

- Meadow Park Elementary School
- The Academy
- Kingsway Elementary School
- Ainger Middle School

On-Site Activities

On-Site Visit Team

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

FDOE, BEESS

- Monica Verra-Tirado, Bureau Chief, BEESS
- Karin Gerold, Program Specialist, Dispute Resolution and Monitoring (DRM)
- Jerry Brown, Program Specialist, DRM
- Anne Bozik, Program Specialist, Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities
- Trevis Killen, School Social Work, Student Support Services Project (SSSP)
- Curtis Jenkins, School Counselor, SSSP
- Diana McLendon, Program Specialist, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

FDOE, Bureau Discretionary Projects

- Paula DeSilva, (Problem-Solving Facilitator), Positive Behavior Support: Multi-Tiered System of Supports (PBS:MTSS)
- Kelly Justice, (Problem-Solving Facilitator), Problem Solving: Response to Intervention (PS:RtI)
- Helen Burton, Project Manager, Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (SEDNET)
- Deidre Phillips, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
- Iris Burgonese, Facilitator, FIN
- Lisa Friedman-Chavez, Regional Transition Representative, Project 10: Transition Education Network
- Leigh Anna Nowak, Consultant, Center for Autism Related Disabilities (CARD)
- Lael Engstrom, Project Manager, State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)
- David Davis, State Technology Team Coordinator, Technology and Learning Connections (TLC)
- Janet Good, Region 3 Technology Coordinator, TLC
- Tony Dutra, Region 5 Technology Coordinator, TLC
- Iris Borghese, Facilitator, FIN
- Chris Vatland, Postdoctoral Research Scholar, MTSS:PBS

Data Collection

On-site monitoring and assistance activities included the following:

- Review of recent data
- School-level administrator interviews - eight participants
- Teacher interviews - 24 participants
- Classroom walk-through visits - seven classrooms
- Student focus groups - 14 participants
- Action-planning and problem-solving process - 32 participants

Status Updates on the 2013-14 On-Site Visit

The following information is excerpted from the 2013-14 on-site monitoring report. Additional information has been added in bold to update the status of the recommendations and required actions.

Next Steps from the 2013-14 On-Site Monitoring Report	
Incidents of Restraint and Seclusion	
Summary:	<p>Based on 2013-14 school year data, the district's number of restraint incidents and the number of students being restrained was significantly higher than any other size-alike district.</p> <p>Based on 2013-14 school year data, the district's number of seclusion incidents and the number of students being secluded was significantly higher than the state average and any other size-alike district.</p> <p>Based on 2013-14 school year data, the district's rate (number of students restrained or secluded divided by students with disabilities population) for restraint was 2.41, and 0.87 for seclusion, which was more than twice the state average for restraint and more than three times the state average for seclusion for the 2013-14 school year.</p>
Required Actions:	<p>By February 16, 2015, the school district must provide BEESS with a report comparing the number of incidents of restraint and seclusion. The report will include an analysis to determine which crisis intervention program utilized in the district appears to be used more frequently in restraint and seclusion incidents. The report must cover the period of the first semester of the 2014-15 school year. Results of the comparison data and the district's plans in response to this data shall be provided to BEESS no later than February 26, 2015.</p> <p>By February 26, 2015, the school district shall inform the bureau regarding the status of the collaboration with each of the following discretionary projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district shall collaborate with PBS:MTSS in order to build the school district's capacity to better assist schools to develop effective discipline, social skills teaching and behavior support strategies for all students. • The district shall continue to collaborate with SEDNET regarding facilitating a comprehensive system of care for high-risk

	<p>students and students with an Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) and their families.</p> <p>By March 31, 2015, the district is to provide the bureau with an update on the progress due to implementation of the actions determined at the problem-solving sessions.</p>
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	<p>The district provided documentation that indicated a comparison of restraint and seclusion data from the first semester of the 2013-14 school year with the first semester of the 2014-15 school year. The report indicated that the center school had a marked increase in incidents of both restraint and seclusion.</p> <p>The district provided an analysis and narrative which indicated that possible variables included a switch of crisis prevention programs within the district as well as a high staff turnover rate at one particular school. In addition, the district provided training with a different crisis management program at one of the schools that reported high rates of restraint.</p>
Summary:	The district's dropout rate for students identified with an EBD is 11 percent, which is higher than the state rate and its enrollment group.
Recommendation:	It is recommended that the Charlotte County School District implement an early warning system in all schools. Such a system will provide a means to identify students who need additional support to improve academic performance and stay engaged in school.
Required Actions:	<p>The district shall follow through with planned actions to reduce the dropout rate. In addition, the district may consider collaborating with the following discretionary projects or other evidence-based support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PBS:MTSS Project and the PS:RtI Project and its Technology & Learning Connections for Assistive Technology and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Team • Project 10: Transition Education Network • SEDNET <p>By March 31, 2015, the district is to provide the bureau with an update on the progress due to implementation of the actions determined at the problem-solving sessions.</p>
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	The district provided a narrative indicating that the district had begun to implement an early warning system which tracked both early warning indicators as well as positive performance indicators. School-based problem-solving teams reviewed the data and used the information to drive both instruction and interventions.

Required Actions:	According to s. 1003.57, F.S., once every three years, each school district and school shall complete a BPIE assessment with a FIN facilitator and include the results of the BPIE assessment and all planned short-term and long-term improvement efforts in the school district's SP&P. The district shall schedule with FIN for completion of the required BPIE. No later than February 17, 2015 , the district is to notify BEESS of the scheduled date.
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	The district completed the BPIE on March 31, 2015. In addition, the district provided a narrative indicating that the district had begun to restructure remedial programs at Tier 1 for all students using the district's MTSS plan. The district indicated that the teachers were participating in weekly trainings on the topic of differentiated instruction.
Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process	
Summary	Additional action planning and problem solving for other priorities for the school district in regard to restraint and seclusion, dropout and LRE will be scheduled by the SST liaison for the school district and the ESE director. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By March 31, 2015, the SST team, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan(s) and determine additional next steps, as appropriate.
Status Update 2013-14 Monitoring Visit:	The district indicated that due to scheduling conflicts throughout the school year they were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of their action plan. Prior to the on-site visit, the district began collaborating with various discretionary projects to address the areas of concern.

The following additional information regarding the status update for the 2013-14 action plan was provided by discretionary project staff members working with the district prior to the 2014-15 on-site visit:

- The PBS co-facilitator was to conduct a face-to-face meeting on August 5, 2014, with the problem-solving team members from the 2013-14 on-site visit. This meeting was cancelled as several district staff members had conflicts on that day. As of the date of the 2014-15 on-site visit, the rescheduling of the August 5, 2014, meeting had not occurred. On May 28, 2015, a meeting was held with the district and the PBS co-facilitator to discuss the action plan that was revised on the on-site visit.
- There were no updates available for the activities from the action plan developed in April 2014, and there appeared to be little contact between the co-facilitator and district regarding the next steps from the 2013-14 on-site action plan.
- The PBS project members stated that they had reached out to the district regarding a restraint and seclusion workgroup. The district submitted documentation prior to the 2014-15 on-site visit that included an agreement to participate.
- The PBS project members stated that they continued to work with the district MTSS leadership team with data review and used the information to guide the district's strategic plan. District-level staff was also trained in interpersonal skills and the eight-step problem-solving method. The district had been participating in monthly meetings related to these trainings.
- The PBS project members stated that some schools expressed interest in using the four-step problem-solving method with students. Professional development and technical assistance in training for the four-step problem-solving method is being scheduled.

- SPDG members reported that their project had been working with the district since March 2014 to implement Check and Connect, which is a mentor program, in five middle schools and two high schools. On-going technical assistance was being provided.
- SPDG members stated that site mentors were trained and that the district was sending more people to be trained in order to help build the capacity within the district.
- SPDG was also scheduled to meet with the district to discuss implementing Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) strategies for learning. The district indicated that they would like to first see the program “in action” before committing to utilizing the program in schools.
- FIN members reported that they had provided materials on differentiated instruction and UDL for the district’s professional learning communities.
- FIN members reported that they had made several attempts since April 2014 to schedule the BPIE with the district. A meeting scheduled for February 5, 2015, was cancelled because invited participants were unable to attend. Dates for March 3 and 5, 2015, were made available, but FIN had not received confirmation from the district as of February 2015. On March 31, 2015, the BPIE was completed.
- Project 10 members reported that the district contact for the “Standing Up for Me” self-advocacy curriculum had been trained. They also reported that members from the Charlotte Technical Center presented at the Project 10 Winter Meeting.
- Project 10 members reported that a parent night was conducted in the district, and information regarding post-school opportunities and resources from Project 10 was shared.
- The Project 10 members stated that they hoped that the district would contact them to conduct further training within the district.
- CARD members reported that they have worked with families in the district, but not directly with the district. CARD members indicated that they were not sure what the specific needs were for the students with an ASD within the district.
- CARD members reported that they had a parent resource fair, and more families attended than in the past. Members attributed this to the fact that they were able to distribute information within the schools.
- SEDNET members reported that they had been attending monthly meetings at the district. In February 2015 members attended a district meeting with behavior specialists to discuss what resources could be provided in the district.
- SEDNET members reported that there would be training in the Crisis Prevention Institute’s (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention specifically related to students who were identified with an ASD, based on requests from district staff members.
- SEDNET members reported that behavior specialists had asked for Trauma Informed Care training for students with mental health and behavioral needs.
- SEDNET members would also be touring district schools with behavioral units and meet with the district leadership team to discuss next steps.

BPIE Assessment

The district completed the BPIE assessment with FIN facilitators on March 5, 2015. Data was collected regarding leadership and decision-making, instruction and student achievement and communication and collaboration indicators. An initial FIN Services Plan was developed on March 31, 2015, and included the following goals relevant to the 2014-15 on-site monitoring visit:

- “The district will analyze data to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps that increase the number of students with disabilities in general education and natural contexts.”
- “The district will increase from one to three blended classes for students with disabilities, ages three through five, receiving special education and related services in the regular early childhood program with peers without disabilities.”

- “The district will develop key personnel to support best practices for inclusive education at the district and school levels.”
- “Charlotte County will increase the percentage of students with disabilities in regular class placement from 49 to 54 percent by May 2016.”

2014-15 ESE Monitoring and Assistance On-Site Visit Results

The following data is related to the focus areas and activities for the 2014-15 ESE Monitoring and Assistance for Charlotte County School District.

Incidents of Restraint

According to the FDOE’s restraint and seclusion database, the district has decreased the number of incidents of restraint over the past three years. In addition, the total percentage of students with disabilities restrained in Charlotte for the 2014-15 school year is **2.56** percent while the state average is .89 percent.

Charlotte- Restraint					
2012- 2013 (August - July)		2013-2014 (August - July)		2014- 2015 (August - May)	
Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Number of Incidents	Number of Students
396	119	293	69	236	74

Incidents of Seclusion

According to the FDOE’s restraint and seclusion database, the district has increased the number of incidents of seclusion over the past three years. In addition, the total percentage of students with disabilities secluded in Charlotte for the 2014-15 school year is **1.18** percent while the state average is .20 percent.

Charlotte- Seclusion					
Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Number of Incidents	Number of Students
154	35	167	25	183	34

Dropout Rates

The Federal Dropout Rate for Students with Disabilities: The number of students who exited special education due to 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 exceeded the state rate during the 2013-14 school year.

Dropout

	2012-13	2013-14
Charlotte	19.5%	21.7%
State	20.3%	19.2%

Educational Environment

LRE: The number of students with disabilities ages six through 21 served inside the regular class for 80 percent or more of the day divided by the total number of students with disabilities ages six through 21 reported in October (Survey 2). The data do not include parentally-placed private school students or students served in the Florida county jails, in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice facilities or in the Florida Department of Corrections. The district's percentage of students with disabilities being served in the regular class is far below the state average.

Students with Disabilities in Regular Class

Charlotte	57%	57%	49%	46%
State	68%	71%	71%	74%

Interviews Conducted

Student Focus Groups

Students from Ainger Middle School and The Academy participated in student focus groups that included the following topics: IEP and transition IEP meetings, career and technical education, college preparation, academic experiences, participation in extracurricular activities, accommodations, dropping out of school, suspensions and expulsions from school and other resources or services needed.

Ainger Middle School

Three students with varying exceptionalities were interviewed and shared the following information:

- All students were included in the general education setting for most academics.
- The students received math or language arts instruction in a resource setting.
- Students stated that they felt "babied" and believed that the work that they were given was "too easy." They expressed a desire to be taught "harder" work.
- Students expressed concern about transitioning to the ninth grade and not being prepared due to the lack of rigorous instruction. Students stated that with more supports, they could be successful in the general education setting without having to be pulled into a resource room.
- The interviewers commented that the students demonstrated strong self-advocacy skills during the focus group.
- The students stated that they knew that communication skills were important for their future.
- Some students expressed the need for more speech therapy. They believed that they needed to improve their speech and needed the extra support to be successful in high school.

Three students from the Communication Disorders (CD) classroom were interviewed and shared the following information:

- All but one student was being instructed using the access points curriculum.
- Students stated that most of them had been in the general education setting in elementary school, but most were placed in a self-contained setting in middle school.
- Two students began middle school in an inclusive setting, but were moved to a self-contained setting.
- One student stated having tried inclusion, but it was too difficult, which was the reason for being moved back to a self-contained setting.
- Most students expressed an interest in having opportunities to be with their nondisabled peers. The students believed that if they were given more supports and accommodations, they could be successful in the general education setting.

The Academy

Eight students with disabilities were interviewed and shared the following information:

- Most students reported that they did attend their IEP meetings and had contributed to the development of their IEP. One student attended IEP meetings in middle and high school, and reported that the IEP meeting in high school seemed much more important.
- All students were working toward a standard diploma. One student reported having been encouraged by a counselor at their former school to pursue a special diploma. The student had dropped out, but went to The Academy with a desire to finish school and obtain a standard diploma.
- Students reported that The Academy was helping them prepare for post-school outcomes. Teachers and staff supported them 100 percent, even offering to provide references for job applications. The students stated that they did not receive this type of help in their traditional high schools. One student shared that they would have wanted to begin their high school experience at The Academy.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers from various school settings participated in interviews on the following relevant topics: incidents of restraint and seclusion, progress monitoring and use of data, supports and accommodations, graduation rates, dropout rates and LRE.

Five teachers and one behavior specialist serving students with an EBD as a primary disability in self-contained classrooms in grades kindergarten through fifth grade were interviewed. This school was a cluster site for the district's EBD program. The teachers were interviewed on topics of incidents of restraint and seclusion, supports, instruction, progress monitoring and data collection, and provided the following information:

- Teachers reported that the school's administrators were very supportive and the increase of supports for the classrooms for students identified with an EBD had been great.
- Teachers reported that a "chill out room" was put into place in December 2014, where students could go if they were having a difficult time or for positive behavioral reinforcement. The behavior analyst was most often the person monitoring the room.
- Teachers believed that the incidents of restraint had decreased overall. However, data showed month-by-month inconsistencies. They hypothesized that these inconsistencies were because of students coming in and out of the program, and that the students were faced with different behavioral challenges.
- Teachers stated that they would like to have more refresher sessions for CPI's techniques.
- Teachers stated that PBS was not consistently implemented throughout the school.

- Teachers reported that there were level systems in the classroom with point sheets, with positive behaviors built into the levels and associated with different privileges.
- Teachers indicated that when the students were able to be included in the general education setting, they continued to work on the level system with point sheets, and that progress monitoring was used when transitioning students to a more inclusive setting. They expressed that they felt separate at times and expressed a desire for more inclusion of their students into the general education setting. They expressed a need for more in-class supports to allow for more successful transitions of students from the self-contained to inclusive settings.
- Teachers reported that the special area teachers had expressed a need for more training on working with the students with disabilities. Student success in the special area classes varied depending on the teacher's knowledge and tolerance of certain behaviors.
- The teachers expressed a desire to be able to attend general education professional development opportunities, but were limited based on time and their schedule.
- Teachers reported that they did not have enough copies of textbooks for the general education curriculum, including teacher editions.

Five teachers (ESE and general education), two Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and one behavior specialist serving students in grades K-5 through the district's CD program were interviewed. This school was a cluster site for students identified with an ASD and an Intellectual Disability (InD). Teachers were interviewed on the topics of LRE, supports and accommodations, instruction, progress monitoring and data collection, and provided the following information:

Interview with ESE teacher, general education teacher and an SLP

- The continuum of services at the school included consultation with an ESE teacher, inclusion, resource pull-out and self-contained units for the students in the CD program. There was also support provided through paraprofessionals.
- The ESE teacher provided "push in" services to the general education classrooms. The SLP stated that they provide "push in" and "pull out" services, with "push in" services for those students in the CD classroom.
- Teachers stated that they used the problem-solving method with open communication that was centered on student need. This allowed the school to foster more inclusive placements for students with disabilities.
- Teachers stated that teacher referrals were the primary means of moving students from the self-contained classroom to a more inclusive setting. Teachers did state that data was used, but did not explain the types of data.
- Teachers stated that the IEP teams made the decision to move students into different educational settings, and the decisions varied by the individual student. Teachers also stated that the team brainstormed the need for the transition to occur, and the school's leadership would align resources to support the transition.
- Teachers stated that the factors they felt were most likely to prevent a student from participating in an inclusive environment were student behaviors (e.g., lack of maturity, social skills), scheduling and a lack of personnel for support.
- Teachers stated that they did provide accommodations to students with disabilities. They stated that they needed more materials for interventions, more technology and more teachers.

Interview with ESE teachers, behavior specialist and an SLP from the CD program

- There were seven self-contained units with 82 students with disabilities at the school site. Students are referred to the CD program from other schools. Teachers stated that the CD program had an occupational therapist that helped students with sensory schedules, and a sensory room was also in place. The teachers stated confidence in the team at the school.
- Teachers stated that they would “push out” students with disabilities into the general education setting in the academic subject that was the strongest for the student.
- Teachers stated that the idea of fostering more inclusive placements for students with disabilities depended on the individual school administrator’s attitudes and beliefs. Teachers also reported that a flexible master schedule individualized for the students also fostered more inclusive placements.
- Teachers stated that some initiatives in place to foster inclusion were stability balls used in the ESE and general education classrooms, peer buddies for social-skills modeling, reading buddies and therapy dogs for reading and socialization practice. Teachers also stated that some special area teachers had redesigned their classrooms to accommodate students.
- Teachers stated that they held meetings with the general education teachers at the beginning of the year and at the time of a student’s placement in the general education setting to discuss accommodations. Paraprofessionals would shadow the student in the general education setting and gradually fade those services.
- Teachers stated that the biggest barrier with inclusion is that the students have to be exposed and taught on grade level even if their skills are not on grade level. Teachers expressed that they wanted to do what was required, but at the same time provide accommodations and teach what the students needed for remediation skills. Also, teachers stated that mastering skills through the access points curriculum was “impossible” for some students.
- Teachers stated that the curriculum provided in the regular education setting did not lend itself to providing supplementary aids and services, which was another barrier of inclusion.
- Teachers also stated that there were outside barriers such as primary language and education of families.
- Teachers stated that they used Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children, a communication program, in their classrooms for the first time this year. They used visual strategies, much small group work, high expectations with consequences, and individualized behavior plans.

Four teachers (ESE and general education), SLPs and one SLP intern serving students through the district’s middle school CD program were interviewed. This school was a cluster site for students identified with an ASD and an InD. Teachers were interviewed on the topics of LRE, supports and accommodations, instruction and progress monitoring and data collection, and provided the following information:

- Teachers stated that there was a strong collaboration among the ESE team members.
- Teachers knew their students and their students’ needs. They were optimistic about their students’ potential.
- Teachers expressed some confusion about the definition of the resource rooms, support facilitation and co-teaching methods of service delivery. Teachers also referred to the classroom for students identified with an InD as the “functional unit.”
- Teachers stated that some of the ESE students that were included in the general education setting in many cases outperformed their nondisabled peers and did not need a high level of supports within the classroom. Teachers stated that one barrier to inclusion in the general education setting was scheduling students with disabilities into those classes.
- The two teachers for students served in self-contained settings stated that they did not

believe that their students were ready to be included in the general education setting, and that their classrooms provided a protective environment for some of the students.

- The teachers also stated that there were some students who could possibly be included in an inclusive setting while still transitioning to and from the self-contained classroom.
- Teachers stated that there were students working on standard curriculum and access points in the same classroom, with multi-grade instruction occurring.
- Teachers stated that if they had more supports, they could make instruction more effective throughout for all grade levels.

Five teachers from The Academy were interviewed. This school had a population which included students who had dropped out of their traditional high schools and had returned to obtain a high school diploma or to prepare for the General Educational Development (GED) Test. The Academy also housed a program referred to as the suspension-expulsion-alternative program. Teachers were interviewed on the school climate, graduation rate, supports provided to students and progress monitoring and data collection, and the following information was provided:

- The relationships built between administration, staff and students were the key to success and there was very little staff turnover.
- The teachers stated that they consistently ask themselves, "How can I make this an environment that students will want to be here?" The teachers stated that they were willing to do whatever they could for the students. The motto was "I will not let you fail."
- The teachers stated that they have had a solid understanding of Tier 1 interventions and supports and implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS).
- The school participates in fundraisers and applies for grants to allow students to participate in activities that the students would not ordinarily feel comfortable in participating in at their traditional high schools (e.g., pictures, prom).
- The schedule consisted of a block schedule of four classes a day, with classes changing every quarter. Teachers stated that having six classes a day was difficult for some students to handle, especially if they did not have much support at home.
- Teachers stated that many of the students in the program had already dropped out of school. They attributed motivation and support provided at the school to student success.
- Teachers stated that they review and analyze data frequently. Student attendance is a big issue, and they hold attendance and graduation meetings on a weekly basis and student assistance team meetings on a monthly basis. These meetings take place before the school day begins, but there was 99 percent staff participation as the teachers want to be there. During these meetings, teachers discuss student concerns and work together to help provide needed supports both in and out of school.
- Teachers stated that credit retrieval was a barrier for students with disabilities because the online course offered by the district could not be modified and was impersonal. Teachers stated that the students they teach need the "up-close and personal teaching" to assist with understanding. Paraprofessionals are in the classrooms to help students.
- The suspension-expulsion-alternative program housed at The Academy provided a second chance for students in grades six through 12. Teachers stated that the district is highly committed to at-risk programs.
- Teachers stated that most students do not choose to transition back to their home-zoned traditional high school from The Academy. It was reported that one student transitioned back to the student's traditional high school in order to play sports.

Administrator Interviews

Administrators from various school settings participated in interviews on the following relevant topics: incidents of restraint and seclusion, progress monitoring and use of data, dropout rates, graduation and LRE.

Two administrators from the cluster site for students identified as having an EBD were interviewed on incidents of restraint and seclusion, supports, instruction, progress monitoring and data collection. The following information was provided:

- There were five self-contained classrooms, varying from eight to 13 students in each classroom. Each classroom had a full-time teacher and a full-time paraprofessional. In December 2014, the school hired an assistant principal with an ESE background. There were two floating paraprofessionals to provide additional support.
- Administrators stated that they had initiated a positive behavior program entitled “Leader in Me,” which has produced positive results. Administrators reported that they were using PBIS schoolwide.
- Administrators reported that they had switched from Techniques for Effective Aggression Management to CPI’s Nonviolent Crisis Prevention as their crisis management program. There would be CPI training with a focus on students with an ASD in May 2015. This training occurred May 5 and 7, 2015, and June 2, 2015. In addition, the school was scheduled for training on Trauma Informed Care in November 2015.
- Behavior intervention plans were in place for students, and there was consultation between the regular and special education teachers regarding the information.
- Progress monitoring for students with disabilities was similar to all students regarding academics, but there was also progress monitoring for behaviors for students with disabilities.
- Administrators reported bi-weekly child study talks where restraint and seclusion were discussed and possible hypotheses were developed for individual student behaviors. The school used a Restraint Data Analysis form to track the school’s restraints. In the child study talks, each student was discussed, needs were determined and proposed solutions were discussed on how to meet the needs of the students.
- Administrators expressed a need for more support for inclusive settings. They did mention a “conversion” class, which was a combination of general education and students with disabilities working with a general education teacher and an ESE teacher.
- Administrators reported that obtaining textbooks and other teaching materials was difficult. There were often not enough teacher manuals, and sending schools often did not send the workbooks and other materials with the students who were transferring to the cluster site schools.
- Administrators reported that the school’s behavior analyst charted the behavioral and restraint data and it was discussed with the child study team.

Four administrators from the elementary CD cluster site and the cluster site for students with an InD were interviewed on the topics of LRE, supports and accommodations, instruction and progress monitoring and data collection. The following information was provided:

- Administrators stated that there was a continuum of services in place at the school. They also reported that eight of the students who had been served in the self-contained CD class were now in a full inclusion setting.
- Administrators reported that half of the students in the self-contained class were working on Florida Standard Assessment curriculum and half were working on access points.
- Administrators stated that conducting the BPIE at their school level would be investigated. They stated that they were fearful that 100 percent of students in inclusion settings would

not work, noting that some students need a continuum of services. It was reported that inclusion began in third grade, and the full-time behavior specialist and SLPs worked with the general education teachers as needed.

- Administrators stated that they would provide what the students needed to the best of their ability.
- Administrators stated that accommodations were individualized for each student. They stated that the accommodations that were used daily should be allowed on the standardized tests.
- Administrators stated that a barrier to helping below-grade-level students in the general education setting was a lack of time and staff.
- Administrators stated that many interventions and progress monitoring tools were utilized in the classrooms. Teachers would collect data and follow up with small group instruction.

One administrator from the middle school cluster site for students identified with a CD or with an InD was interviewed on the topics of LRE, supports and accommodations, instruction, progress monitoring and data collection. The following information was provided:

- The administrator stated that the school was the only middle school in the district with a CD unit.
- The administrator stated that the program was very unique, and run very differently with more challenges academically than in the general education classrooms.
- The administrator expressed a concern that having 15 students in the CD class with a teacher and paraprofessional did not allow for the level of support needed.
- The administrator stated that their biggest frustration was the staff.
- The administrator stated that changes in scheduling from a six-period to seven-period day, as well as block scheduling over the past several years due to budget cuts resulted in a total of over nine weeks of instructional time lost.
- The administrator stated that the general education classrooms would be implementing SIM strategies for learning in their classrooms during the upcoming school year.
- The administrator asked for co-teaching for students that would be included in the general education setting, but the administrator's description of those services appeared to be more aligned with the role of support facilitation. The administrator believed that the co-teaching model could possibly eliminate the excessive need for the resource room while still maintaining a continuum of services
- The administrator expressed a willingness to consider inclusion, but wanted to ensure proper supports for success.

One administrator from The Academy was interviewed regarding the school climate, progress monitoring and data collection, dropout rates and graduation. The following information was reported:

- The administrator shared that "relationships were the key to success." The climate of the school was very much like a big family and expectations were high.
- The Academy was a school of choice. Students could be removed from the program, although it was not done often. Some students would go back to home-zoned schools with the understanding that they needed to achieve certain expectations before being able to return.
- There were many options offered for graduation, including the performance-based standard diploma option, the 18-credit accelerated program, and also classes and materials for the GED.
- Regarding the decrease in the district's graduation rate, the administrator speculated that district-wide, there may be a passion for teaching; however, teachers were not willing to

change their teaching methods in order to implement new practices.

- Supports included small group ratios in some classes, individualized instruction, differentiated instruction and “do over-do better” philosophy at the school. The administrator indicated transcripts, grades and attendance were looked at closely, and that there were attendance meetings every Friday. Attendance and behavior contracts were created for some students, and there was a high percentage of parental support.
- Attendance meetings, graduation meetings, and student assistance team meetings were held on a regular basis.

Classroom Walk-Through Visits

Classroom walk-through visits were conducted at the two elementary schools and The Academy. Seven classrooms were visited.

Commendations

1. The district was utilizing a data tool for teachers and administrators entitled School Portal, which allowed for data collection, distribution and disaggregation related to early warning factors such as discipline, attendance and the provision of interventions for students at risk of dropping out.
2. There was a strong sense of respect regarding the educational environment among administrators, teachers, students and parents at the schools visited, which promoted a positive school climate.
3. The teachers and administrators interviewed were open to new ideas and expressed a need for a more inclusive school environment for students with disabilities.
4. The students in the focus groups stated that they could communicate their opinions in their classes, which teachers valued. The students also demonstrated strong self-advocacy skills.

Action-Planning and Problem-Solving Process and Next Steps

Summary:	Prior to the 2014-15 on-site visit, the district signed a memorandum of understanding with the PBS project to participate in the PBS Restraint and Seclusion Workgroup, which entails collaborating with a district leadership team in a problem-solving and action-planning process that will 1) assist the district in evaluating their restraint and seclusion data, 2) assist the district with conducting a needs assessment to determine their strengths and needs, 3) identify evidence-based strategies to address restraint and seclusion, and 4) implement and evaluate the evidence-based strategies.

Required Action:	<p>The district must continue participation in the PBS Restraint and Seclusion Workgroup and provide BEESS with quarterly updates that will include a summary of the activities and data on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 28, 2015 • October 30, 2015 • January 29, 2016 • April 29, 2016 <p>No later than August 28, 2015, the district must submit evidence of the development of an action plan with long- and short-term goals designed to reduce the need for restraint and seclusion in the district. The district must submit narratives on the progress of the action plan to the bureau on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 30, 2015 • January 29, 2016 • April 29, 2016 <p>No later than October 30, 2015, the district will submit evidence (sign-in sheets with personnel names and roles, time and date of training) of a completed CPI training with an emphasis on Autism for school personnel who have students who have a primary or secondary diagnosis of an ASD and other appropriate personnel.</p> <p>In addition, no later than October 30, 2015, the district will provide de-escalation training for school personnel who have students who have a primary or secondary diagnosis of an EBD. Documentation of both trainings should be provided to BEESS no later than November 20, 2015.</p> <p>No later than October 30, 2015, the district will submit evidence (sign-in sheets with personnel names and roles, time and date of training) of participation and documentation from any required follow up activities from the CARD module.</p>
Dropout Rates	
Summary:	The district's federal dropout rate for students with disabilities was reported at 21.7 percent for the 2013-14 school year, which is above the state average of 19.2 percent.
Required Action:	<p>The district must submit evidence (e.g., professional development training documents, early warning criteria and accompanying student data, dropout data, MTSS team meeting agendas and notes, District Improvement and Assistance Plan) of implementation of the School Portal and application of MTSS no later than the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 30, 2015 • January 29, 2016 • April 29, 2016

Educational Environment - LRE	
Summary:	The district's rate of students with disabilities being served for more than 80 percent of the time in regular education settings was 49 percent during the 2013-14 school year and decreased to 46 percent during the 2014-15 school year.
Recommendation:	The district will continue to collaborate with FIN to ensure that the BPIE services plan is implemented at both the district and school level.
Required Action:	The district must submit evidence (e.g., action plans for inclusion of students, BPIE services plan, student LRE data, professional development training documentation) of implementation of the district's plan for the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting to the bureau on the following dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 28, 2015 • October 30, 2015 • January 29, 2016 • April 29, 2016
Phases 3 and 4 of the ESE Monitoring and Assistance process	
Summary:	By December 18, 2015, and April 1, 2016 , the SST, ESE director and designated district staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's action plan(s) and determine additional next steps, as appropriate.

Technical Assistance

1. **Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support for Behavior: Recommended Practices for School and District Leaders** (Florida's PBS 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.
2. The district's **ESE Policies and Procedures** document provides district- and school-based standards for documenting, reporting and monitoring the use of manual, physical or mechanical restraint and seclusion developed by the FDOE. The school district's document for the 2013-14 through 2015-16 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 <http://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 the 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 that draws from emerging research and best practices
 - **Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources** that indexes federal technical assistance and other resources
 - **Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations** that catalogue state laws and regulations related to school discipline
5. **Functional Behavioral Assessments and Positive Interventions Benchmarks of Effective Practice** (Florida's PBS Project) may be accessed at http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/pdfs/pbs_FBA_Benchmarks.pdf.
6. **Problem Solving and Response to Intervention State Project (PS:Rtl) Problem Solving and Response to Intervention – Technology** may be accessed at <http://www.floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>. One function of this project provides regional technology coordinators and technology specialists the support 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.

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

2014-15 ESE Monitoring and Assistance

State Support Team for Charlotte County School District

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

Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

The following is a list of acronyms, abbreviations and terms used within this report.

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BEESS	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
BPIE	Best Practices for Inclusive Education
CARD	Center for Autism and Related Disorders
CD	Communication Disorder
CEIS	Coordinated early intervening services
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CPI	Crisis Prevention Institute's Nonviolent Crisis Intervention
DRM	Dispute Resolution and Monitoring
EBD	Emotional behavioral disability
ESE	Exceptional student education
FIN	Florida Inclusion Network
FDLRS	Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System
FDOE	Florida Department of Education
F.S.	Florida Statutes
GED	General Educational Development
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual educational plan
InD	Intellectual disability
ISS	In-school-suspension
LEA	Local educational agency
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of support
OSS	Out-of-school suspension
PCM	Professional Crisis Management
PBIS	Positive Behavior Interventions and Support
PBS	Positive Behavior Support
PBS:MTSS	Positive Behavior Support: Multi-tiered System of Supports
PS:Rtl	Problem Solving: Response time to Intervention
SEDNET	Multiagency Network for Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities
SIM	Strategic Instruction Model
SPDG	State Personnel Development Grant
SP&P	Exceptional Student Education Policies and Procedures
SSSP	Student Support Services Project
SST	State Support Team
UDL	Universal Design for Learning



Pam Stewart, Commissioner

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