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PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Honorable Chair and Members of the School Board  
Michael J. Burke, Superintendent  
Chair and Members of the Audit Committee

**FROM:** Teresa Michael, Inspector General *TM*

**DATE:** May 5, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Transmittal of Final Investigative Report:  
*22-0015-I Woodlands Middle School*

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Attached please find a copy of the Palm Beach County School District Office of Inspector General (OIG) Final Report of OIG Case 22-0015-I. On May 13, 2022, the OIG received a complaint regarding alleged misconduct on the part of Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks. Specifically, it was alleged that Mr. Brooks copied and pasted present levels and goals from previous years on Individualized Education Plans (IEP), did not provide parents/guardians with parental participation forms or the forms were not provided within the required time-frame, did not ensure IEP team compliant meetings, and falsified IEP reevaluation meeting documents.

The OIG investigation concluded that the allegations related to Brooks copying and pasting present levels and goals and falsifying IEP reevaluation meeting documents were **Unsubstantiated**. The remaining allegations related to parent participation forms and non-compliant IEP meetings were **Substantiated**.

In accordance with *School Board Policy 1.092.9.b.iv.*, on April 13, 2023, the draft of this investigation was provided to Brian Brooks for a response. A written response from Mr. Brooks was received by the OIG and included in the final report.

The findings of this report were referred to the Chief of Human Resources for action deemed appropriate.



# ***OIG CASE NUMBER 22-0015-I***

## ***Woodlands Middle School***

***TYPE OF REPORT: FINAL***

***DATE OF REPORT: May 05, 2023***



*Teresa Michael*

**Teresa Michael, Inspector General  
Office of Inspector General  
School District of Palm Beach County**

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# *Office of Inspector General*

## *Report of Investigation 22-0015-I*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

From May 13, 2022, through March 07, 2023, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted interviews and reviewed pertinent documentation and records related to an allegation that Woodlands Middle School (WMS) Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Coordinator Brian Brooks violated Rule 6A-10.081 of the Florida Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, School Board Policy 3.02, Code of Ethics, and the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by copying and pasting students present levels and goals from previous years on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), holding non-compliant IEP meetings, and not providing parents/guardians with a Parent Participation Form (PPF) within the required time frame prior to a meeting.

The OIG concluded that allegations 1b. and 1c. that Brian Brooks violated the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by not providing PPFs within the required time to parents/guardians, and ensuring meetings were in compliance in relation to who was present at meetings were **Substantiated**. Allegations 1a. and 1d. where Brooks violated Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-10.081, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, and School Board Policy 3.02, Code of Ethics were **Unsubstantiated**.

On April 13, 2023, the OIG forwarded a copy of the draft report to Brian Brooks. On May 1, 2023, Brooks submitted a written response. The response is attached in its entirety as **Exhibit 10**.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

During the course of the investigation, the following management issues were observed and are referred to the ESE Director, Woodlands Middle School Principal, and the Chief of Human Resources for review and consideration.

- The OIG recommends that the Principal and ESE Director ensure all ESE staff at WMS receive training on how to properly complete IEP and Reevaluation documents.
- The OIG recommends the Principal and ESE Director review WMS ESE student records to ensure documents that may have been created in error are deleted from EdPlan.

- The OIG recommends the Principal and ESE Director ensure the 18 students listed in the Additional Information section of this report are receiving services as prescribed in their IEP.
- The OIG recommends the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent complete a structural review of chain of command in ESE as the ESE Department has no oversight of ESE coordinators, yet are charged with “compliance” and principals not being fully versed in the LEA Representative’s obligations.

## INVESTIGATIVE PREDICATE

On May 13, 2022, the School District of Palm Beach County, Office of Inspector General received a complaint from Speech Pathologist Alyssa Croll regarding alleged misconduct on the part of Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks. Specifically, Croll alleged that Brooks copied and pasted students present levels and goals from previous years on student IEPs, held non-compliant IEP meetings by either falsifying the attendance of staff or not including the required staff, and did not provide parents/guardians with a Parent Participation Form (PPF) within the required time frame prior to a meeting.

On May 25, 2022, OIG Investigator Veronica Vallecillo was assigned the complaint for investigation.

The OIG concluded that allegations 1b. and 1c. that Brian Brooks violated the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by not providing PPFs within the required time to parents/guardians and ensuring meetings were in compliance in relation to who was present at meetings were **Substantiated**. Allegations 1a. and 1d. where Brooks violated Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-10.081, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, and School Board Policy 3.02, Code of Ethics were **Unsubstantiated**. The investigation findings of the allegations will be discussed in detail later in this report.

## BACKGROUND

Woodlands Middle School (WMS) is a public school located at 5200 Lyons Rd., Lake Worth, Florida. The student enrollment at WMS is approximately 1600, serving grades 6-8. Based on information obtained during this investigation WMS serves 300 ESE students that receive services requiring and IEP.

EdPlan is a web-based specialized educational management system that integrates students' process with District reporting systems to include ESE related information. The District officially went live with EdPlan in August 2020.

## ALLEGATIONS 1a. to 1d.

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It is alleged that WMS ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks violated Rule 6A-10.081 of the Florida Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, School Board Policy 3.02, Code of Ethics, and the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by:

- 1a). copying and pasting students present levels and goals from previous years on student IEPs.

1b.) not providing parents/guardians with a PPF within the required time frame prior to a meeting.

1c.) not ensuring all IEP team members attend required IEP meetings.

1d.) falsifying documents reflecting that reevaluation meetings took place that did not actually take place.

Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-10.081, states in part,

*“2.c. Obligation to the profession of education requires that the individual:*

*1. Shall maintain honesty in all professional dealings.*

*8. Shall not submit fraudulent information on any document in connection with professional activities.”* Quoting Rules 6A-10.081(2)(c)1. and 6A-10.081(2)(c)8., F.A.C.

School Board Policy 3.02.5.c., Code of Ethics states:

*“5.c. Misrepresentation or Falsification – We are committed to candor in our work relationships, providing other Board employees including supervisors, senior staff and Board members with accurate, reliable and timely information. Employees should exemplify honesty and integrity in the performance of their official duties for the School District.”*

*iii. Falsifying or misrepresenting information reported regarding the evaluation of students and/or District personnel;*

School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide (2021-2022)<sup>1</sup> requiring the following:

#### *Role of the Local Education Agency (LEA)*

*The Local Education Agency Representative is the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team participant who is responsible for facilitating IEP meetings, consensus when the team is in disagreement, and ensuring proper implementation of IEPs on behalf of the district. He or she ensures that the IEP meets compliance with State and Federal Regulations...*

#### *Preparing for an IEP Meeting*

*2. The LEA Representative must ensure that parents receive a written notification inviting them to attend the IEP meeting with at least 10-days' notice.*

<sup>1</sup> The Guide was derived from the District's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Policies and Procedures (SP&P) document approved by the Superintendent for submission to the Florida Department of Education on April 2022.

5. *The IEP team, with a reasonable number of participants, shall include:*

- a. The parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student.*
- b. The student, as appropriate, and in all meetings that address transition services needs and consideration of postsecondary education and career goals.*
- c. At least one general education teacher of the student, if the student is or may be participating in the general education environment; the general education teacher of a student with a disability participates, to the extent appropriate, in the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP. In rare circumstances, the team may excuse the general education teacher.*
- d. At least one special education teacher of the student, or, where appropriate, one special education service provider of the student.*
- e. A representative of the school district (LEA) who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, is knowledgeable about the general curriculum and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the district.*
- f. An individual who can interpret the instructional implications or recommendations of evaluation results (evaluation specialist). This role may be fulfilled by another member of the IEP team. (That member would sign on two lines of the IEP).*
- g. At the discretion of the parent or the school district, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel, may be invited to attend. The determination of the knowledge or special expertise shall be made by the party who invited the individual to participate in the IEP team meeting.*

#### *Annual IEP Meeting*

4. *Teachers and staff review previous annual goals and objectives with their supporting DATA (student work samples, informal and/or formal assessments, evaluations, etc.).*

6. *The IEP team will develop appropriate goals and objectives based on the Present Level of Performance (PLOP) and determine the supplemental aids and services and special education services recommended to support mastery of the goal(s). The goals and objectives drive the placement.*

### *Reevaluation Process*

- 1. Prior to the upcoming reevaluation due date, the parent must be invited to a meeting, via Parent Participation Form, with the purpose of the meeting stated on the form.*
- 2. The IEP team must consider reevaluation needs for students at least every three years. Observations must be completed by all service providers and the Reevaluation Process is followed in EDPlan.*

## **COMPLAINANT INTERVIEW**

**On May 16, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of Speech Pathologist Alyssa Croll was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Croll” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Croll stated she is a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP). Croll, at the time of the complaint, provided speech and language services at Park Vista Community High School, Woodlands Middle School, and Hospital Home Bound.

Croll explained the concerns she reported to the OIG regarding Brooks were initially noticed by another SLP at WMS. Croll stated she was not comfortable providing the name of the other SLP. Croll said the SLP that initially noticed the issues was “alarmed” by some of the things she saw during her review of student IEPs. Croll noted some of the IEPs the SLP reviewed did not have goals, or if they did have goals, the goals did not make sense. Croll stated goals should be completed by the student’s teachers. Croll noted one of the IEPs that was reviewed had an elementary teacher listed instead of a teacher from WMS. **Investigator Note: The OIG found the document that reflected teachers/staff from the student’s elementary school.**

Croll stated that she knows what Brooks does with the IEPs was “deliberate” because not all students have generic information on their IEPs. Croll explained that Brooks does not use generic blurbs or falsify meeting information with students that have parent involvement.

Croll said she reported her concerns regarding Brooks to her supervisor, Speech Language Pathologist Specialist Suzette Gingold, on September 30, 2021. Croll noted that prior and after reporting her concerns, she offered to assist Brooks. Croll said Brooks blamed a lot on COVID; teachers not showing up to IEP meetings, and being inundated and overwhelmed. Croll said Gingold asked her to not report any issues to the Principal and give Brooks a chance to rectify the issues. Croll noted it appeared Brooks tried to do things differently until January 2022, where it seemed he went back to his “old ways.”

Croll reported that on January 27, 2022, Brooks finalized a student’s IEP without a meeting taking place. Croll asked Brooks about it and offered to hold an IEP meeting. Subsequently, the IEP meeting for the student was held on February 10, 2022. Following



the incident, Croll met with Gingold on February 11, 2022, to report the incident that took place on January 27, 2022.

On February 28, 2022, Gingold asked Croll to provide the list of issues to Regional Resource Teacher Allison Ahern. Croll emailed Ahern the list on March 1, 2022. **(Exhibit 1)** As of the date of the interview, Croll said she has not had any communication with Ahern regarding the list.

## **WITNESS INTERVIEWS**

**On May 27, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of WMS Principal Jenifer Kuras was conducted at Woodlands Middle School in Lake Worth, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Kuras” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Kuras stated she became the Principal at Woodlands Middle in July 2021. Kuras was initially made aware of some potential issues regarding ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks by SLP Alyssa Croll. Kuras explained that Croll came to her sometime in April 2022, regarding IEPs that had outdated or inaccurate information. Kuras said she asked Croll to provide her with documentation of the concerns she had. Kuras noted the information Croll provided was related to incidents that took place prior to Kuras starting at WMS.

Subsequently, Kuras contacted ESE Director Kevin McCormick via telephone (Kuras did not have the date the telephone call took place.) Kuras stated that her and McCormick discussed how to rectify the issues presented by Croll. (e.g. ensuring all staff are trained, have administration be part of the IEP meetings, and monitor activities to ensure IEPs were in compliance.

Kuras stated that sometime in May 2022, SLP Corei Stealey reported concerns regarding Brooks and the completion of IEPs. Kuras said that she had Assistant Principal Dawn Hartman meet with Stealey and Croll to discuss their concerns. Kuras noted Hartman reviewed the information provided by Croll and Stealey.

Kuras said that Hartman met with Brooks regarding the concerns that were presented. Kuras did not have details regarding what took place during the meeting with Hartman and Brooks. Kuras noted she had not met with Brooks. Kuras explained that her “investigation” into the allegations was still ongoing, and therefore she had not disciplined Brooks. Kuras noted that she planned on reviewing all 300+ student IEPs to determine any issues and ensure the issues are rectified.

**Investigator Note: During the interview, Kuras said she would set up a shared Google folder, giving the OIG access, where she and Hartman would maintain information regarding their review of the IEP files. On August 25, 2022, the OIG followed up with Kuras regarding the progress of the review. Kuras said they did not have access to fix the errors. Kuras added that ESE Director Kevin McCormick was going to have someone from his department look into the matter.**

Kuras stated that prior to the concerns reported by Croll and Stealey, she had not had any issues with Brooks or received complaints or concerns from staff or parents regarding Brooks.

**On May 31, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of WMS Assistant Principal Dawn Hartman was conducted at Woodlands Middle School in Lake Worth, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Hartman” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Hartman stated that she started at WMS as Assistant Principal in September 2021. Hartman said her primary responsibility is 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but she also oversees the Science and ESE Departments for WMS.

The OIG staff asked Hartman if she had received any complaints or concerns regarding the WMS ESE Department or the ESE Coordinator Brooks. Hartman stated that since early in the school year there were conflicts between Brooks and two SLPs, Alyssa Croll and Corei Stealey. Hartman noted that in listening to the different concerns staff had, it appeared there were “a lot of personality conflicts” between them.

Hartman said that during October 2021, Croll and Stealey told her they reviewed old IEPs and were concerned with the way speech goals were written. Hartman stated that Croll and Stealey did not provide her with specific examples or students at the time. Hartman added that Croll and Stealey reported their concerns to their supervisor Suzette Gingold. Hartman met with Gingold (Hartman does not recall the date of the meeting) regarding Croll’s and Stealey’s concerns. Hartman said that the concerns all came back to “personality issues”, with Brooks, Croll, and Stealey not getting along. Hartman noted she subsequently met with Brooks and explained that he needed to give Croll and Stealey a chance, and to work together as a team. Hartman said that for a while things were quiet and she assumed things were better.

On May 16, 2022, Stealey provided Hartman with documentation that reflected various issues with IEPs. Hartman said Stealey explained that she found IEPs for some of her students that reflected she (Stealey) had attended IEP meetings that she did not attend in January 2022, several students that did not have a record of a parent meeting notification, IEP goals appeared to be copied and pasted from other records, and that some students may not be receiving services as required by the IEP.

Hartman said that after her meeting with Stealey, she met with Kuras regarding Stealey’s concerns. Kuras asked Hartman to meet with Brooks regarding the issues. On May 18, 2022, Hartman met with Brooks. Hartman said she did not discuss every detail provided by Stealey, but did discuss IEP goals being copied/pasted. Hartman explained that Brooks denied copying/pasting IEP goals. Hartman noted Brooks got “very defensive” and said that Croll and Stealey were just out to get him. Hartman stated she notified Kuras of the results of her meetings with Brooks.

**On November 17, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of Speech Language Pathologist Corei Stealey was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Stealey” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Stealey stated she has been employed by the District for approximately two years. Stealey stated she was currently assigned to Diamond View Elementary and last year she was assigned to Woodlands Middle School.

Stealey stated that early in the year (SY 2021/22) she noticed discrepancies in some of her student’s IEPs (Stealey said she had approximately 40-50 students during SY 2021/22). Specifically, Stealey noticed IEPs for some of her students had been completed and finalized even though she had not completed the sections in the IEP pertaining to her student’s goals, present levels, etc. Stealey said that she emailed Brooks regarding the discrepancies she had observed. Stealey added that Brooks would at times correct the issue or other times not. Stealey disclosed her concerns to Alyssa Croll.

Subsequently, Croll and Stealey reviewed all of the ESE student files at Woodlands and found 46 IEPs that had the same “blurb” as the prior year in the communications and curriculum sections of the IEP. The OIG asked Stealey if she asked Brooks about her and Croll’s findings. Stealey said she did speak to him about it, but Brooks said he was busy doing the best he could, because ESE teachers were not completing their portions of IEPs.

Stealey explained that she and Croll reported their concerns to Gingold. **Investigator Note: Stealey did not have a record of when she and Croll met with Gingold.** Stealey added that she wanted to report the issues directly to the Principal, but Gingold suggested they speak to Brooks about it first.

Stealey said that on May 10, 2022, she met with Principal Kuras to share her concerns and provided her with a list of issues they found while reviewing ESE files. Stealey noted that Kuras was under the impression that the matter stemmed from employees not getting along. Stealey added that Brooks said negative things about her and Croll to school administrators. Kuras asked Stealey to meet with Assistant Principal Hartman to discuss her concerns.

On May 16, 2022, Stealey and Hartman met to discuss the concerns and review the information gathered by Stealey and Croll. Subsequently, Stealey and Hartman met again on May 20, 2022, Stealey wanted to follow up with Hartman and understand what the next steps would be. Hartman told Stealey she was working on setting up a meeting with the ESE Department to go over the information.

The OIG asked Stealey if anyone from the ESE Department or Woodlands Middle contacted her regarding the matter after May 2022. Stealey said no one had contacted her.

**On November 14, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Specialist Suzette Gingold was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Gingold” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Gingold stated she has been with the ESE Department for approximately 18 years. Her current responsibilities include providing technical support to the Speech and Language Pathologists regarding speech and language needs at her assigned schools (Woodlands Middle School is included). Gingold noted there is a critical shortage of SLPs, and therefore she is also filling in for SLPs as needed. Gingold said she is also part of the SLP leadership team, as she supervises some SLPs.

Last school year, on September 30, 2021, one of the SLPs at Woodlands Middle School, Alyssa Croll, sent her an email asking to speak regarding concerns she had. Gingold met with Croll to discuss concerns Croll had with the Woodlands ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks. Croll alleged that speech and language student related meetings were taking place without her knowledge and parent rights were being violated by not giving the parent the opportunity to participate in the IEP meetings. Gingold asked Croll to first follow chain of command and speak directly to Brooks regarding her concerns in hopes of them maintaining a good working relationship.

The OIG asked Gingold if she reviewed any student IEP files to determine if Croll’s allegations were valid. Gingold said she did not review any files. Gingold added that she took Croll at her word and knows Croll to be competent.

On October 1, 2021, Gingold reached out to Resource Teacher Allison Ahern. Gingold said that Ahern is in charge of ESE compliance for the region. Gingold said she shared Croll’s concerns with Ahern.

The OIG asked Gingold if she supervised Brooks. Gingold said Brooks’ supervisor is the Principal. The OIG asked Gingold if she notified the Principal of Croll’s concerns. Gingold said she reported the concerns to Ahern, her supervisor Joan Clark, and the SLP leadership team, but did not initially notify the Principal. Gingold added that it was her understanding that Ahern communicated the allegations to the Principal.

Gingold asked Croll to provide Ahern with a list of the issues she observed so that the issues could be addressed/corrected.

Gingold stated that on February 16, 2022, she met with Ahern, Assistant Principal Hartman, Principal Kuras, and Brooks regarding the SLP’s concerns. Gingold said that during the meeting Brooks stated that Croll was a trouble maker and was creating issues. The OIG asked Gingold if Croll’s allegations were addressed during the meeting. Gingold stated, “I don’t think we ever got that far”. Gingold said that Brooks was “rude, and disrespectful.”

**On June 22, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Manager Joan Clark was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Clark” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Clark stated she has been in her position as ESE Manager since November 2021. Clark noted that prior to her current position she held similar roles within the ESE Department. Clark added that she has four administrators that report to her; Suzette Gingold, Beverly Keyser, Eileen Petersen, and Ginae Fields. Each administrator oversees a region.

Clark explained that SLP Alyssa Croll alleged Brooks falsified meetings and student goal information on various IEPs. Croll requested to have her name removed from the IEPs. Clark stated that Croll provided her with a list of student names and issues related to each student’s IEP. Clark was unable to recall when Croll reported the issue.

Clark stated she reviewed “a few” IEPs on the list Croll provided to her and noticed the goals were the same as reported in previous years. Regarding the allegation that meeting records were fraudulent, Clark said she was unable to verify if meetings took place or who was present.

Clark stated that she followed up with Principal Jenifer Kuras regarding the matter. Clark said Kuras told her that she met with Croll and Brooks regarding the matter and they were working on mending their relationship and moving forward.

**On November 18, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Resource Teacher Allison Ahern was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Ahern” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Ahern has been an ESE Resource Teacher since 2017. Ahern stated she provides support to 6-8 south region schools. Currently she is providing support to Diamond View Elementary, Freedom Shores Elementary, Royal Palm School, Hidden Oaks, Palm Springs Middle, and Woodlands Middle. Last school year she had the same schools but instead of Palm Springs Middle, she had Pahokee Middle/High School.

Ahern said her responsibilities include assisting the schools with ESE resources, ESE compliance, attending meetings, and reviewing student eligibilities. Specifically, for compliance, Ahern said she ensures the schools are following procedures and guidelines.

Ahern noted she works with the school ESE Coordinators and ESE teachers. Ahern said she does not supervise the Coordinators or Teachers.

The OIG asked Ahern if she reviews student IEPs as part of her compliance responsibilities. Ahern said that she reviews the IEPs for the meetings she attends.

The OIG asked Ahern if she is aware of any ESE issues that took place last year at WMS. Ahern said that she received an email from another SLP with concerns, but could not recall exactly what the concern was, but it was but “something to the affect that maybe she wasn’t invited to a meeting or something like that.”

Ahern stated she forwarded the information to her supervisor Joanne Thornton. The OIG asked Ahern when she received the email. Ahern said she did not recall when she received it. Ahern noted she could not recall anything more about the email.

The OIG asked Ahern what the outcome of the matter was. Ahern said she did not know what happened after she sent the information to her supervisor. She could not recall anything more regarding the email. **Investigator Note: District email records reflect she emailed Thornton on March 1, 2022. (Exhibit 2)**

The OIG asked Ahern if she was aware of any other issues that were reported to her regarding compliance at Woodlands. Ahern said, “No”.

The OIG asked Ahern if ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks has come to her regarding any concerns. Ahern stated he had not.

The OIG asked Ahern if she was aware of any noncompliance issues at Woodlands. Ahern stated, “no”.

The OIG explained to Ahern that the OIG received a complaint related to ESE compliance issues at WMS. Ahern reiterated that she received an email from an SLP. Ahern noted the email had a list, but she could not remember if the list was about a specific student. Subsequently, Ahern recalled the email she received had a “spreadsheet of sorts” Ahern did not recall the details of the list, but then remembered the complaint was that the SLP had not been invited to a meeting.

The OIG asked Ahern if Thornton asked her to do anything regarding the information that was received. Ahern stated she could not recall if she and Thornton subsequently discussed it. Ahern was only sure about forwarding the email to Thornton.

The OIG gave Ahern a hypothetical scenario regarding IEP meetings not being held on an annual basis and information just copied and pasted onto the IEP. The OIG asked Ahern if such a scenario would be a problem. Ahern stated, “That would not be a compliant meeting”, “that’s not following rules”, and “yes, it would be a problem.”

The OIG asked Ahern if she recalled any emails or conversations with either Clark or Gingold regarding concerns at WMS. Ahern recalled attending a virtual meeting with Gingold, the WMS Principal, and Brooks. Ahern was unable to recall when the meeting took place. Ahern stated that to her recollection the meeting was regarding an “interpersonal concern” with an SLP. Ahern stated she had nothing to say during the meeting because she was not in a supervisory role.

**On December 6, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Program Support Manager Joanne Thornton was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Thornton” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Thornton has been in her position as an ESE Program Support Manager for approximately 11 years.

Thornton stated some of her job responsibilities included: handling due process related complaints and State complaints, attending meetings when necessary, supervising ESE resource teachers, overseeing the ESE Solutions Center, and compliance matters.

The OIG asked Thornton to provide an overview of some of the responsibilities of the ESE Resource Teachers she supervises. Thornton said Resource Teachers assist the ESE coordinators at the schools. Thornton noted that if a Resource Teacher found an issue with an ESE related matter, the Resource Teacher would make note of the issue and let the ESE Coordinator know what the issue was so that it could be fixed. Thornton added that the Resource Teachers find issues often.

The OIG asked Thornton whose responsibility it was to ensure ESE IEP files were correct. Thornton stated that each school was responsible for making sure the files were correct. Thornton added that the ESE Department provides guidance, training, and ensures compliance.

Prior to the interview, the OIG asked Thornton to review her records and bring any information regarding complaints received regarding WMS. Thornton was under the impression the OIG asked specifically for complaints during 2020, therefore provided information regarding a complaint that took place sometime in 2020. When asked if she could recall any other complaints. Thornton said she was contacted by an SLP from WMS. Thornton said she could not recall the name of the SLP or the date she received the phone call. Thornton explained that the SLP had concerns that there were IEP meetings where she was listed as having attended the meeting when she actually did not attend. Thornton said she asked the SLP if she had told anyone at the school level about her concerns. The SLP told Thornton that she had, but felt that nothing was done about her concerns. As a result of the phone call, Thornton said she did the following: reported the concern to McCormick, spoke to Alison Ahern, and asked Ahern if she had ever been in a meeting where she noticed any issues. Ahern told Thornton she was not aware of such issues. The OIG asked Thornton if she asked the SLP for specifics (dates, names of students.) Thornton stated that she did ask the SLP, but the SLP never gave her any evidence to support the allegations.

The OIG asked Thornton if she asked Ahern to investigate the concern. Thornton said she did not ask because she thought “it was bigger than us”. Thornton stated the SLPs concern was regarding fraud.

The OIG asked Thornton if McCormick asked her to do anything regarding the matter after she reported the concern. Thornton stated she thought the matter may have been referred to Professional Standards.

The OIG provided Thornton with the list of concerns and an email Ahern sent to her on March 1, 2022. The OIG asked Thornton if she was familiar with the spreadsheet. Thornton stated she had not seen the document. Thornton said she did not remember the email.

After reviewing the email, Thornton said Alyssa Croll was the SLP that contacted her with the concern. Thornton added she knew there were multiple complaints regarding Brooks from Croll.

The OIG asked Thornton what actions she or her team took to address the allegations. Thornton said she recalled having conversations with Ahern and that Ahern spoke with Brooks. Thornton added that Brooks always appeared to be someone that was very caring and wanted the best for students. Thornton stated she got the impression there were “interpersonal things” going on as well, based on her conversation with Croll.

The OIG asked Thornton how she would have handled the matter had Croll provided her directly with the spreadsheet that included her concerns. Thornton said she would have had Ahern look into it and fix the issues, if they were true.

**On December 9, 2022, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Director Kevin McCormick was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “McCormick” as they relate to the Allegations:**

McCormick explained he first learned about the complaint related to the WMS ESE Department on March 3, 2022. McCormick said he received an email from ESE Manager Joan Clark regarding an SLP at WMS that had communicated concerns that the WMS ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks had IEP meetings and documented them as if the SLP attended the meeting when in actuality the SLP was not present. McCormick did not know the name of the SLP. Subsequently, McCormick communicated the concerns on March 4, 2022, to WMS Principal Jenifer Kuras. McCormick stated that he expressed his concern about the implications and also let her know that IEP meetings were required to have certain team members in attendance. McCormick said that Kuras told him she would look into the matter.

McCormick stated that he followed-up with Kuras and Kuras assured him the matter had been handled. The OIG asked McCormick how Kuras handled the matter. McCormick said that Kuras investigated the matter, but he was not sure of the specifics of the investigation or the outcome. McCormick added that, “I did not see it as my responsibility because it’s not my staff member to be able to question her on what the results were of that investigation.”



McCormick stated that on April 22, 2022, Kuras emailed McCormick and provided an update that the SLP and Brooks were working to ensure the correct information was documented and Assistant Principal Hartman was facilitating the progress. Additionally, the SLP and Brooks were working on mending their relationship. **(Exhibit 3)**

The OIG asked McCormick if Thornton had reported the issue to him. McCormick said he meets daily with Thornton regarding various issues and does not remember.

McCormick stated he at some point (did not recall the date) met with ESE Assistant General Counsel Laura Pincus and informed her of the matter at WMS. McCormick said that Pincus suggested he report the issue to the OIG. The OIG asked McCormick if he reported it to the OIG. McCormick said, "I believe I did." The OIG asked McCormick who he spoke to at the OIG. McCormick was unable to recall who he spoke to and did not have any records of the issue being reported to the OIG. **Investigator Note: The OIG does not have a record of McCormick reporting the issue.**

The OIG asked McCormick if he reported the issues to any other department, such as the Office of Professional Standards (OPS). McCormick searched his records and did not find record of a referral to OPS.

The OIG reviewed the concerns included in the complaint with McCormick. McCormick stated he was only aware about the meeting issues. McCormick said that copying and pasting information on IEPs was "highly discouraged."

The OIG asked McCormick who is responsible for the compliance of ESE files. McCormick stated that the Local Education Agency Representative (LEA) for each school was responsible for the compliance of the files and the School Principal was responsible for ensuring the LEA was doing the job. McCormick added that he is the "LEA for the District" and "when I'm aware" "it is my responsibility to address it." The OIG asked McCormick if he was aware of the issue and McCormick said he was aware.

The OIG asked McCormick how the issues could be corrected/fixed. McCormick explained that the only way to correct the issue is to have IEP meetings for each student. McCormick added that it was not the ESE Department's role to fix the files, and it is the role of the school to complete the IEP meetings. McCormick said if the school asks for assistance, the ESE staff will provide guidance and support.

**Investigator Note: On January 5, 2023, McCormick emailed the OIG to report that his staff completed a random sampling audit of IEPs and found that goals were being repeated from one year to the next, but they were unable to determine if all documented participants actually participated in the meetings. Additionally, McCormick said his team would be providing support/training for goal writing. (Exhibit 4)**

## **SUBJECT INTERVIEW**

**On January 27, 2023, a sworn recorded interview of ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks was conducted at the Office of Inspector General in West Palm Beach, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by “Brooks” as they relate to the Allegations:**

Brooks said that he has worked at WMS for approximately for 17 years. Brooks is currently an ESE Coordinator at WMS. Brooks said his responsibilities include coordinating IEP meetings, providing notices to parents 10 days prior to meetings, attending IEP meetings, and finalizing the IEPs for approximately 300 ESE students at WMS. Brooks said he has about 4-5 meetings per day in order to complete all 300 IEPs.

Brooks indicated that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Florida Department of Education (FDOE), and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) are governing directives associated with Exceptional Student Education (ESE).

WMS has used EdPlan for about 2-3 years. Brooks said the transition to EdPlan was difficult and initially staff could not be trained due to COVID restrictions.

Brooks stated that IEPs must be completed annually. Brooks explained that in order to have a compliant IEP meeting a general education and ESE teacher must attend in addition to himself and any applicable service providers (i.e. SLP). Parents are not required to attend in order to have a compliant meeting. Brooks confirmed he is required to provide the parents a 10-day notice of the meeting via a Parent Participation Form (PPF). Brooks admitted that there were times when he forgot to invite a service provider.

Brooks said that he sends a “Google invite” for the IEP meeting to the participants. The OIG asked Brooks if he maintains a record of who attends each meeting. Brooks stated that the attendees are listed on the IEP. Brooks explained that in EdPlan there can be confusion regarding attendees because sometimes participants were listed that did not attend the meeting or vice versa. Brooks further explained that EdPlan required participants are listed on the IEP prior to the meeting.

Brook explained that during the meetings the focus is on the student’s present levels, educational placement, goals, and what support is needed. Brooks stated the student’s teachers and service providers have access to student’s IEPs. Each teacher and service provider should access the IEP and update their respective section. Brooks explained that during the meeting the IEP is in draft form and all applicable items are discussed in order to finalize the IEP by the end of the meeting. Brooks noted that once an IEP is finalized it cannot be edited. **Investigator Note: The OIG verified with the ESE Department that in fact, an IEP cannot be modified once it has been finalized on EdPlan. In order to edit a finalized IEP, a request to the ESE Department would have to be completed.**

Brooks said he does not develop a student's goals. The ESE teacher/case manager assigned to the student is responsible for developing the curriculum and goals. The OIG asked Brooks if he has changed a student's goals. Brooks stated the he has only changed a student's goals during a meeting if it was necessary based on discussions. The OIG asked Brooks if a student's goals should change each year. Brooks explained that the goals should change, but there are times where a student has not mastered their goals and therefore the goals may remain the same the following year. Brooks indicated that there were times when teachers were not comfortable changing the goals since students were not in the classroom during COVID, and therefore there was not enough classroom observation time to be able to make a determination.

Brooks noted that this school year (2022/23) ESE staff was trained on how to better develop students' goals. Brooks stated that in the past, staff did not do the best job with developing a students' goals.

The OIG asked Brooks if it was possible to cut and paste the goals from the previous year. Brooks explained that in EdPlan, when an IEP is first started, the previous year's goals are listed and the system prompts you to delete the goals. The OIG asked Brooks if he has cut and pasted information on an IEP. Brooks said he has only done it within the same IEP. **Investigator Note: The OIG verified with the ESE Department that when a new IEP document is created on EdPlan, select previous year information is populated on the new document.**

The OIG asked Brooks if he ever listed that a meeting took place that actually did not take place on the IEP. Brooks stated, "Never." Brooks said he has never falsified information on an IEP.

Brooks stated his priority is "the health, the wellbeing and the progress of that student."

The OIG asked Brooks if he had any issues with ESE teachers or service providers. Brooks stated that he never had any issues until last year. Brooks said that last year he had issues with SLPs Alyssa Croll and Corei Stealey. Brooks explained that staff was complaining that Croll and Stealey were not going to classes to provide the required services. As a result, Brooks met with them and another SLP (Sarafine Lamothe) and suggested they "play like a team." Brooks explained that the meeting did not go well and some of the SLPs got defensive. Brooks noted that since the meeting, the relationship between he and the SLPs deteriorated. Brooks added that Croll also had issues with the Principal and it became a "difficult atmosphere."

**On March 2, 2023, the OIG conducted a follow-up meeting with Brooks as a result of documents reviewed. A sworn recorded interview of ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks was conducted at the Woodlands Middle School in Lake Worth, FL. The following represents actual and paraphrased statements made by "Brooks" as they relate to the Allegations:**

The OIG discussed that in Brooks' previous interview on January 27, 2023, Brooks stated that he completed four to five IEP meetings per day.

Brooks said that it all depended on the time of the year, and it could be one a day or none.

The OIG explained that EdPlan records indicated that on January 28, 2022, 18 meetings related to re-evaluations may have taken place. Brooks said, "It could be possible, I'm not sure".

The OIG asked Brooks how long reevaluation meetings last. Brooks said sometimes they can last over 30 minutes.

The OIG asked Brooks to check his records regarding student [REDACTED]. Brooks was unable to access the student's records because the student was no longer at WMS. Brooks said that he knew the student and family very well. Brooks stated, "I know absolutely his parents were involved." "I guarantee you the parents were at the meeting." The OIG asked Brooks to access his calendar for January 28, 2022, to determine if he had record of the meeting or a Google meet link. After reviewing his calendar entries, Brooks said he did not have the student on his calendar. Brooks stated that he did not falsify any reports.

The OIG asked Brooks to check his records regarding student [REDACTED]. Brooks retrieved the student's physical file. The file did not contain a hard copy of the reevaluation document listed in EdPlan dated in January 2022. The OIG asked Brooks if the meetings documented on EdPlan took place. Brooks stated that the meetings did occur.

Brooks explained that he does not depend on EdPlan and instead depends on the student's physical file. Brooks added that the physical file was "kind of like our bible." Brooks said he did not have the time to upload signed documents to EdPlan. Brooks explained that at some point there was confusion with how reevaluations were completed on EdPlan. Brooks explained that prior to EdPlan, one document needed to be completed for reevaluations. However, when EdPlan was implemented reevaluations required two documents, and therefore there was a lot of confusion. Brooks added that there were some student files where he had to go back at a later date and complete the second step. Brooks explained the planning document was derived from a meeting to discuss the students' needs and the second document feeds from the planning document/meeting. The OIG asked Brooks to clarify if two meetings actually take place as reflected on the reevaluation planning document and the reevaluation determination document. Brooks said two meetings do not take place.

The OIG asked Brooks to check his records regarding student [REDACTED]. Brooks reviewed the student's information on EdPlan. Brooks said, "we made that mistake, we only did the planning document." Brooks noted the student was (at the time of the interview) under reevaluation.

The OIG asked Brooks if he generated documents without a meeting taking place. Brooks stated, "Absolutely not." Brooks noted that things fall through the cracks at times. The

OIG asked Brooks that if some of the meetings were held in person, should there be signatures on the documents. Brooks said, "I don't know, I usually have them."

The OIG asked Brooks to check his records regarding student [REDACTED]. Brooks retrieved the student's physical file. Brooks did not find the January 2022, reevaluation documents reflected for the student on EdPlan in the physical file. Brooks added that he did not print all documents.

Brooks said that it is possible those reevaluations could have been "off" because of COVID. Brooks explained that his team sometimes block off 2-3 hours to discuss students. Brooks stated that the team could have "sat there and gone through reevaluations" and just called the parents during the review of the student. The OIG asked Brooks if he documented the fact that the team called the parents. Brooks said the re-evaluation document does not have a section for that.

Brooks stated he is not guilty of anything.

**Investigator Note: On March 7, 2023, Brooks emailed the OIG with further explanation to the interview that took place on March 2, 2023. It should be noted the student's referenced in the email are not all the same students discussed during the interview.**

**Brooks' email explained** *"that documents occasionally get created that should not have gotten created and that the ESE Contact is not able to delete them and it's an IT district process. I myself continue on a daily basis learning and finding mistakes made by myself and ESE teachers in a very complex system. Place that on the overwhelming responsibility and daily demand on the ESE contact errors and mistakes do happen as well as requesting to delete files from EdPlan as it is low on the to-do-list and often gets forgotten." "EdPlan is a great resource for looking up and housing documents. We are still required to keep a hard copy file of the IEP process. It is difficult to look at EdPlan and Google calendar for an insight into an ESE process. As we evolve and become more sophisticated in EdPlan that may not still hold in years. You asked about scanning signatures into EdPlan to prove a meeting had happened... I truly wish I had the time to even think about doing something like that. I am one individual with a huge amount of responsibility and demand placed on me daily. I hold approximately 280 IEP meetings, parent conferences, answer about 10-15 parent emails daily, take a minimum of 5-10 parent calls a day, perform morning and afternoon care line duty, lunch duty, monitor ESE staff schedules, hire and maintain paraprofessionals, daily assist with paraprofessional coverage, cover classes when short, attend SBT, attend and supervise after school events, fill in as behavior coverage to support teachers in classrooms, find time for the overwhelming creation of scheduling and creating notices for IEP meetings, etc. I start my day by 7:30am and end it at 4:30 and work continuously through the day. My contractual day is supposed to be 8:40 to 4:05 with 1 planning period per day and a 30-minute lunch. In order to get things done I must work evenings at home making and taking calls, and on an occasional weekend. I say all this as you have seen my frustration. Being questioned about how I had 10 meetings in one or two days or if case managers are cutting and pasting seems somewhat petty to me." "As indicated to you previously I*

*will be moving onto another position at the end of this school year that has nothing to do with ESE. The high demand and responsibility placed on an ESE Contract as one person given minimal assistance and support along with my health issues and the fact that I am counting my remaining years to retirement has made this decision for me.” (Exhibit 5)*

## RECORDS ANALYSIS

### List of Exhibits

- Exhibit 1:** Email dated March 1, 2022 from Croll to Ahern regarding WMS compliance issues
- Exhibit 2:** Email dated March 1, 2022 from Ahern to Thornton regarding WMS compliance issues
- Exhibit 3:** Email dated April 22, 2022 from Kuras to McCormick regarding update on “Woodlands MS investigation” as it pertains to Brooks and ESE concerns
- Exhibit 4:** Email dated January 5, 2023 from McCormick to OIG regarding random sampling audit performed
- Exhibit 5:** Email dated March 7, 2023 from Brooks to OIG regarding follow-up related to interview conducted on March 2, 2023
- Exhibit 6:** OIG review of 58 student records related to copying and pasting present levels and goals on IEPs
- Exhibit 7:** OIG review of 48 student records related to PPFs not provided in a timely manner
- Exhibit 8:** OIG review of 16 student records related to required team member attendance to meetings
- Exhibit 9:** OIG review of 27 student records related to falsified documentation for reevaluation meetings

Interviews and District email records suggest that staff at the school level and ESE Department were aware of the concerns brought forth by the complainant beginning in September 2021. Below are main highlights of communication between staff regarding the matter:

Date	Communication Description
09/30/21	Croll reported concerns to Gingold
Oct 2021	Croll/Stealey discussed concerns with Hartman
10/01/21	Gingold discussed concerns with Ahern
02/16/22	Gingold met with Ahern, Hartman, Brooks
03/01/22	Croll provided list of concerns to Ahern. Ahern provided the list to Thornton
03/03/22	Clark discussed concerns with McCormick
03/04/22	McCormick discussed concerns with Kuras
04/22/22	Kuras provided McCormick with an update stating that SLP and Brooks were working to ensure the correct information was documented and Hartman was facilitating the progress.
05/16/22	Stealey provided Hartman with list of concerns

The allegations brought forth in the complaint will be discussed below in sections 1a through 1d.

Allegation 1a.  
Brooks Copied and pasted present levels and goals  
from previous years on IEPs

As the ESE Coordinator, Brooks is the LEA Representative for WMS.

The School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide outlines the role of the LEA Representative as:

- *Responsible for facilitating IEP meetings, consensus when the team disagrees, and ensuring proper implementation of IEPs on behalf of the district.*
- *Ensuring the IEP meets compliance with State and Federal Regulations.*

Additionally, the LEA Guide states:

- *The IEP team **will develop appropriate goals and objectives based on the present level of performance** and determine the supplemental aids and services and special education services recommended to support mastery of the goal(s). The goals and objectives drive the placement.*
- *Teachers and staff review previous annual goals and objectives with their supporting DATA (student work samples, informal and/or formal assessments, evaluations, etc.) **Emphasis added.***

The list provided by the complainant alleged 58 students had sections in their IEP that were “copied and pasted.” (**Exhibit 6**) The OIG reviewed the IEPs of the 58 students for “identical information” in sections of the IEP. The OIG determined that:

- 23 IEPs were found to have “identical” information from one year to the next in certain sections such as the present goals or communication section.
- 35 IEPs had very similar information from one year to the next. Some appeared to have the same information in a section with the addition of a sentence after it.

When creating an IEP document, information from the previous IEP will generate onto the new document. Therefore, it does not appear information was “copied and pasted”, but instead not updated according to each respective student’s data. The IEP team should have, pursuant to the expectations of the LEA Guide, deleted the existing information and created new goals and included applicable information related to the student’s *present levels of performance* or noted that the student’s present levels of performance were unchanged from the prior year’s IEP.

In August 2021, the ESE Department held a meeting for ESE Coordinators. The presentation associated with the meeting included the following reminder, “When developing a new annual IEP, you **MUST** delete the goals and create new goals. Do not edit them!” As the LEA Representative, Brooks should have ensured the information was being updated by the team. Brooks does not directly work with the students and therefore would not be able to update the information for each respective student.

Based on the testimony obtained and the records reviewed, the OIG determined that the allegation that Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks violated School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by copying and pasting present levels and goals from previous years on IEP was **Unsubstantiated**.

### Allegation 1b.

#### Brooks did not provide parents/guardians with Parental Participation Forms (PPF) or PPFs were not provided within the required time-frame

The School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide states the following, in part:

- *The LEA Representative must ensure that parents receive a written notification inviting them to attend the IEP meeting with at least 10-days’ notice*

The list provided by the complainant alleged 48 student records had issues related to PPFs. The information did not always specify which IEP (date/year) it was related to. Therefore, the OIG reviewed records of PPFs on EdPlan for the 48 students between August 2020 and May 2022 (**Exhibit 7**). The OIG’s review discovered 34 student records with discrepancies. Specifically,

- 27 student records did not have a PPF generated for one or more meetings.
- 7 student records contained a PPF, however, it was either generated on the same day as the meeting or the notice was less than the required 10 days.

The OIG found a justification for the remaining 14 student records on the complainant’s list regarding to PPFs.

During the investigation the OIG found an additional five (5) student records that did not have a record of a PPF generated for a meeting.

The importance of parental involvement in developing or reviewing their child’s needs is paramount. The LEA Guide requires that parents receive written notice 10 days prior to the meeting.

Based on the testimony obtained and the records reviewed, the OIG determined that the allegation that Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks violated the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by not



providing parents/guardians with the Parent Participation Form (PPF) within the required time was **Substantiated**.

1c.

Brooks did not ensure IEP team compliance that all required team members be present for meetings

The School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide states the following, in part:

- *The IEP team, with a reasonable number of participants, shall include:*
  - a. *The parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student.*
  - b. *The student, as appropriate, and in all meetings that address transition services needs and consideration of postsecondary education and career goals.*
  - c. *At least one general education teacher of the student, if the student is or may be participating in the general education environment; the general education teacher of a student with a disability participates, to the extent appropriate, in the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP. In rare circumstances, the team may excuse the general education teacher.*
  - d. *At least one special education teacher of the student, or, where appropriate, one special education service provider of the student.*
  - e. *A representative of the school district (LEA) who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, is knowledgeable about the general curriculum and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the district.*
  - f. *An individual who can interpret the instructional implications or recommendations of evaluation results (evaluation specialist). This role may be fulfilled by another member of the IEP team. (That member would sign on two lines of the IEP).*
  - g. *At the discretion of the parent or the school district, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel, may be invited to attend. The determination of the knowledge or special expertise shall be made by the party who invited the individual to participate in the IEP team meeting.*

The list provided by the complainant alleged 16 student records should have had a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) in meetings since the student was receiving speech

and language services. The OIG reviewed the student records on EdPlan (**Exhibit 8**) and determined:

- 14 of the 16 student records reflected meetings where the corresponding document did not reflect an SLP was present at the meeting.

During Brooks' interview, he admitted that there were times where he forgot to invite an SLP. While these instances may have been oversight on his part, it is still a requirement. Furthermore, ensuring all team members are present to discuss the student's progress and needs is important in order for the student to receive the proper services.

Based on the testimony obtained and the records reviewed, the OIG determined that the allegation that Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks violated the School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide by not ensuring IEP compliance in relation to all required team members being present for meetings was **Substantiated**.

1d.

Brooks falsified IEP reevaluation meeting documents demonstrating reevaluation meetings took place that did not actually take place.

The School District of Palm Beach County Local Education Agency (LEA) Guide states the following, in part:

- *Prior to the upcoming reevaluation due date, the parent must be invited to a meeting, via Parent Participation Form, with the purpose of the meeting stated on the form*
- *The IEP team must consider reevaluation needs for students at least every three years*
- *Observations must be completed by all service providers and the Reevaluation Process is followed in EDPlan.*

The list provided by the complainant contained 27 student records that reflected reevaluation meetings took place between January 27 through January 31, 2022. The complainant alleged that some of the meetings may not have occurred.

The OIG reviewed the 27 student records on EdPlan for the related documentation (**Exhibit 9**). Furthermore, calendar entries, Google meeting records, attendance records, and emails were also reviewed in order to ascertain if the meetings did in fact take place as listed on EdPlan. The OIG determined the following:

- Two student records had calendar entries for the corresponding meeting. No calendar entries were located for the remaining student records.

- Four student records appear to have attendance record discrepancies. Specifically, PeopleSoft records reflected a team member listed in the documents had entries of either sick or without pay on the particular day of the meeting.
- Five student records reflected discrepancies with the meeting dates versus when the document was generated. e.g. documents were generated in Jan 2022, for meeting dates in 2020.
- One student record had documents that reflected team members from the student's previous school.

During the initial interview, Brooks stated he may complete 4-5 meetings in a day. Based on the information reviewed, it appears approximately 18 meetings took place on January 28, 2022 alone. Considering the duration of an IEP meeting, per Brooks' testimony, can last "over 30 minutes", 18 reevaluation meetings in a single day does not seem feasible. It is possible that the documents were created in error by Brooks, as he stated during his interviews. However, the OIG was not able to determine if the documents were truly created in error. The lack of proper record keeping made it difficult (impossible) to determine what truly occurred. Further, Brooks steadfastly maintained he did not falsify reports.

Based on the testimony obtained and the records reviewed, the OIG determined that the allegation that Woodlands Middle School ESE Coordinator Brian Brooks violated Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-10.081, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, and School Board Policy 3.02, Code of Ethics, by falsifying reevaluation meetings was **Unsubstantiated**.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed in this report, two of the allegations made against Brooks were substantiated. Brooks relied on justifications such as COVID, being overwhelmed, and having a large ESE population as reasons why these issues occurred. Whether it was an oversight, lack of understanding of how to properly complete the necessary documents in EdPlan, or not having enough time to handle the workload, the District still has a fiduciary duty to the students to ensure they are receiving the proper education and services designed to meet their unique needs.

It should not go unnoticed that an employee's misconduct concerns that were first reported in 2021, were not fully addressed from a compliance perspective. Instead, rather than determining whether an ESE Coordinator was fulfilling the District's obligations to ESE students required under the law, management appears to have focused on personality conflicts between Brooks and Croll/Stealey. Indeed, SLP Croll and Stealey's concerns were reported to administrators as both the school and District level seemingly without any demonstrated and meaningful, action to address their substantive concerns.

The LEA Guide states, “**The Local Education Agency Representative** is the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) team participant who is responsible for facilitating IEP meetings, consensus when the team is in disagreement, and ensuring proper implementation of IEPs on behalf of the district. **He or she ensures that the IEP meets compliance with State and Federal Regulations...**” That representative in the instant investigation was Brooks. However, Brooks’ failure to meet the LEA Guide requirements, and the way in which SLP Croll and Stealy’s concerns regarding those failures were addressed, did not go unreported to ESE Administration.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

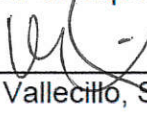
As part of the complaint received by the OIG, the complainant stated that she believed there were 18 ESE students that were not provided services as designated on their respective IEPs. Although, the complainant provided the student names and numbers, the specific service was not explained. It should be noted five of the 18 students are no longer at WMS. The student’s IDs #s are as follows:

[REDACTED]

*The evidentiary standard used by the School District of Palm Beach County OIG in determining whether the facts and claims asserted in the complaint were proven or disproven is based upon the preponderance of the evidence. Preponderance of the evidence is contrasted with “beyond a reasonable doubt,” which is the more severe test required to convict a criminal and “clear and convincing evidence,” a standard describing proof of a matter established to be substantially more likely than not to be true. OIG investigative findings classified as “substantiated” means there was sufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions occurred and there was a violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to support the allegation. Investigative findings classified as “unfounded” means sufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions did not occur and there was no violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to substantiate the allegation. Investigative findings classified as “unsubstantiated” means there was insufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions did or did not occur and a violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to support the allegation could not be proven or disproven.*

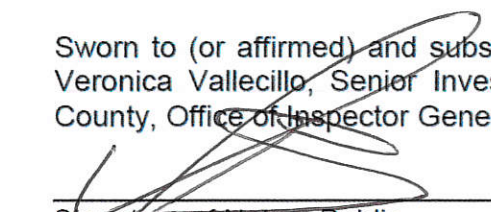
**ATTESTATION**

I, the undersigned, do hereby swear, under penalty of perjury, to the best of my personal knowledge, information, and belief, the contents of this report are true and accurate; and I have not knowingly or willfully deprived or allowed another to deprive, the subject of the investigation of any rights contained in Sections 112.532 and 112.533, Florida Statutes. This investigation was conducted pursuant to School District Policy 1.092, Inspector General, and in accordance with applicable Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspectors General as published by the Association of Inspectors General.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Veronica Vallecillo, Senior Investigator

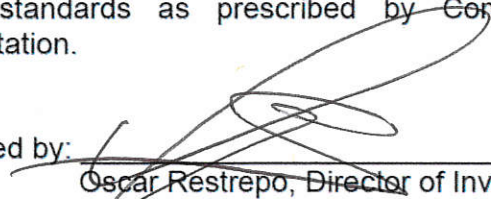
**STATE OF FLORIDA  
COUNTY OF PALM BEACH**

Sworn to (or affirmed) and subscribed before me this 05 day of May, 2023, by Veronica Vallecillo, Senior Investigator for the School District of Palm Beach County, Office of Inspector General, who is personally known by me.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Notary Public  
 Notary Public or  Law Enforcement Officer



This investigation was conducted by Veronica Vallecillo, supervised and approved by Director of Investigations Oscar Restrepo. The investigation was conducted in accordance with guidance from the Association of Inspectors General handbook and within standards as prescribed by Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation.

Approved by:  Date: 5/5/23  
Oscar Restrepo, Director of Investigations

Approved by:  Date: 5/5/23  
Teresa Michael, Inspector General

**EXHIBIT LIST**

Email dated March 1, 2022 from Croll to Ahern..... Exhibit 1  
 Email dated March 1, 2022 from Ahern to Thornton ..... Exhibit 2  
 Email dated April 22, 2022 from Kuras to McCormick..... Exhibit 3  
 Email dated January 5, 2023 from McCormick to OIG..... Exhibit 4  
 Email dated March 7, 2023 from Brooks to OIG ..... Exhibit 5  
 OIG review of student records related to copying and pasting present  
 levels and goals on IEPs..... Exhibit 6  
 OIG review of student records related to PPFs for meetings ..... Exhibit 7  
 OIG review of student records related to required team member  
 attendance to meetings..... Exhibit 8  
 OIG review of student records related to falsification of records ..... Exhibit 9  
 Subject Response dated May 1, 2023 ..... Exhibit 10

**DISTRIBUTION LIST**

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- Jenifer Kuras, Principal
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- OIG File

## IEP compliance issues at Woodlands MS

1 message

Alyssa Croll <alyssa.croll@palmbeachschools.org>

Tue, Mar 1, 2022 at 7:15 AM

To: Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org>

Cc: Suzette Gingold <suzette.gingold@palmbeachschools.org>, Joan Clark <joan.clark@palmbeachschools.org>

Good Morning Ms. Ahern,

I hope this email finds you well. I'm contacting you regarding my concerns with compliance issues at Woodlands. It is my understanding that you have already been in contact with Suzette regarding these issues, but I wanted to make sure you were aware of the full extent of the matter. As recently as Friday, February 25th, Brian has been finalizing IEPs in EdPlan without holding a meeting. He has included my name on the IEPs and documented in the conference notes section that the team participated in the meeting, which is obviously untrue. He has also copied and pasted the same present levels and goals on numerous students' IEPs.

I have tried to address this amicably with him and offer support to assist him, but he continues to knowingly engage in this fraudulent behavior. I'm attaching a list of the medical errors that I'm aware of at this time. Please let me know what I can do to assist in correcting this issue moving forward and to ensure this does not happen again. I greatly appreciate your understanding, help, and support with this.

 WMS IEP errors

Thank you and kind regards,

Case #: 22-0015-I Date Rcv'd: 5/13/22  
Received From: A. Croll  
Description: Email from Croll to  
Ahern regarding concerns  
Exhibit #: 1  
Redactions: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

**From:** on behalf of Joanne Thornton  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 1, 2022 10:04 AM  
**To:** allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org  
**Cc:** kelley.fisher@palmbeachschools.org  
**Subject:** Re: IEP compliance issues at Woodlands MS

Case #: 22-0015-E Date Rcv'd: 11-18-22  
Received From: A. Ahern  
Description: Email from Ahern to Thornton regarding concerns  
Exhibit #: 2  
Redactions: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

Thank you Allison. I will call you after the IEP meeting I am in is over.

On Tue, Mar 1, 2022 at 9:50 AM Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org> wrote:

Good morning!  
Suzette had a google meet with the principal, AP, Brian and myself.  
I can further discuss with you both.  
Thank you!

**Allison Ahern, M. Ed.**  
ESE Resource Teacher  
School District of Palm Beach County  
Department of Exceptional Student Education  
Office Phone: (561) 731-2879  
Email: [allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)

On Tue, Mar 1, 2022 at 9:48 AM Joanne Thornton <joanne.thornton@palmbeachschools.org> wrote:  
Have you shared this with the principal?

On Tue, Mar 1, 2022 at 7:46 AM Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org> wrote:

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Alyssa Croll** <alyssa.croll@palmbeachschools.org>  
Date: Tue, Mar 1, 2022 at 7:15 AM  
Subject: IEP compliance issues at Woodlands MS  
To: Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org>  
CC: Suzette Gingold <suzette.gingold@palmbeachschools.org>, Joan Clark <joan.clark@palmbeachschools.org>

Good Morning Ms. Ahern,

I hope this email finds you well. I'm contacting you regarding my concerns with compliance issues at Woodlands. It is my understanding that you have already been in contact with Suzette regarding these issues, but I wanted to make sure you were aware of the full extent of the matter. As recently as Friday, February 25th, Brian has been finalizing IEPs in EdPlan without holding a meeting. He has included my name on the IEPs and documented in the conference notes section that the team participated in the meeting, which is obviously untrue. He has also copied and pasted the same present levels and goals on numerous students' IEPs.



I have tried to address this amicably with him and offer support to assist him, but he continues to knowingly engage in this fraudulent behavior. I'm attaching a list of the medical errors that I'm aware of at this time. Please let me know what I can do to assist in correcting this issue moving forward and to ensure this does not happen again. I greatly appreciate your understanding, help, and support with this.

 **WMS IEP errors**

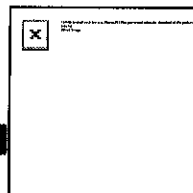
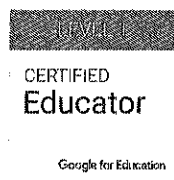
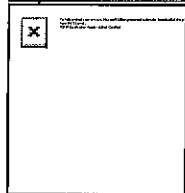
Thank you and kind regards,

**Alyssa Croll, M.S., CCC-SLP**

Speech-Language Pathologist

Woodlands MS, Park Vista HS, & Hospital Homebound

[alyssa.croll@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:alyssa.croll@palmbeachschools.org)



*“And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow.”*

— Jeffrey R. Holland

—  
**Allison Ahern, M. Ed.**

ESE Resource Teacher

School District of Palm Beach County

Department of Exceptional Student Education

Office Phone: (561) 731-2879

Email: [allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)

—  
Joanne E. Thornton

Manager- ESE Program Support

Exceptional Student Education

School District of Palm Beach County

3378 Forest Hill Blvd., A-203

West Palm Beach, FL 33406

(561) 434-7322

[joanne.thornton@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:joanne.thornton@palmbeachschools.org)

Everybody's a Teacher

It's Our Village - They're Our Kids!



Veronica Vallecillo <veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org>

### Fwd: Woodlands MS investigation

1 message

**Kevin McCormick** <kevin.mccormick@palmbeachschools.org>  
To: Veronica Vallecillo <veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org>

Wed, May 25, 2022 at 9:54 AM

Kevin McCormick  
Director, Exceptional Student Education  
School District of Palm Beach County  
(561) 434-8626

We need your help to make Florida's 2021-2022 ESE Parent Survey a record success! You can complete the survey online at <http://www.esesurvey.com>.

If you do not want your e-mail address released in response to a public records request, do not send electronic mail to this entity. Instead, contact this office by phone or in writing.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Jenifer Kuras** <jenifer.kuras@palmbeachschools.org>  
Date: Fri, Apr 22, 2022 at 4:43 PM  
Subject: Re: Woodlands MS investigation  
To: Kevin McCormick <kevin.mccormick@palmbeachschools.org>, Dawn Hartman <dawn.hartman@palmbeachschools.org>  
Cc: Work <joan.clark@palmbeachschools.org>

Good Afternoon,

I met with the SLP this week about this very issue. She shared with me her concerns with me and the areas of the documents. She is working with Mr. Brooks to ensure the correct information is documented. Mrs. Hartman is facilitating the process. We had a great meeting and worked towards mending the relationship between Mr. Brooks and the SLP.

Best,



"Home of the Mustangs"

**Jenifer L. Kuras**  
Principal  
**Woodlands Middle School**  
A Cambridge International School  
5200 Lyons Rd, Lake Worth, FL 33467  
✉ Jenifer.Kuras@palmbeachschools.org

Follow me on Twitter: @SDPBCJenKuras  
Follow our School @WoodlandsMS\_PBC  
Follow our Academies & Elective Programs: @WoodlandsMSAcad @WoodlandsAVID @lia\_woodlandsms

Case #: 22-00151 Date Rcv'd: 5-25-22  
Received From: McCormick  
Description: email chain between Kuras & McCormick regarding concerns  
Exhibit #: 3  
Redactions: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

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[www.palmbeachschool.org](http://www.palmbeachschool.org)

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On Fri, Apr 22, 2022 at 4:26 PM Kevin McCormick <kevin.mccormick@palmbeachschools.org> wrote:

Joan, I am including Jen Kuras to find out the latest on this issue.

Jen,

Feel free to give me a call if we need to discuss.

Thanks,

Kevin

Kevin McCormick  
Director, Exceptional Student Education  
School District of Palm Beach County  
(561) 434-8626

We need your help to make Florida's 2021-2022 ESE Parent Survey a record success! You can complete the survey online at <http://www.esesurvey.com>.

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On Thu, Apr 21, 2022 at 6:41 AM Work <joan.clark@palmbeachschools.org> wrote:

Good morning~

What is the status of the investigation into the allegations of falsifying documents at Woodlands MS? The SLP who made the allegations has requested her name be removed from said documents and is requesting a status update to the process of removing her name. She provided a list of documents, namely IEPs, that are in question. The list has been provided to the Principal. Thank you.

Joan Clark  
Sent from my iPhone



Veronica Vallecillo <veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org>

### Woodlands

1 message

**Kevin McCormick** <kevin.mccormick@palmbeachschools.org> Thu, Jan 5, 2023 at 10:14 AM  
 To: Veronica Vallecillo <veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org>, Oscar Restrepo <oscar.restrepo@palmbeachschools.org>  
 Cc: Kevin McCormick <kevin.mccormick@palmbeachschools.org>

Good morning,

As a follow up to my interrogation/interview prior to our holiday break and discussed by phone with Ms. Vallecillo that afternoon, the Woodlands case is one of three that the ESE Department had knowledge of and worked with the principal and regional office to investigate and resolve. In the other two cases, Jerry Thomas and HL Watkins, we were able to work with administration who worked with Professional Standards to address the employee while the ESE department and regional office investigated the impact and corrective action. In both cases, the concern was substantiated, the staff member was removed and the regional office coordinated staff to review and correct the issues identified.

In this scenario, when the staff who had the initial concern followed up with my administrator and was still concerned, I had advised my administrator to have the employee file a complaint with the OIG.

At your request, we did complete a random sampling audit of IEPs and did find that IEP goals continue to be repeated from one year to the next. We were unable to determine if all documented participants actually participated in the meetings. I have also confirmed that there have been no concerns in the meetings that had ESE regional or district representatives in attendance. At this point, I suggest that I follow up with the principal and ESE coordinator in writing to identify that there is still a problem and request their plan for rectifying the concerns.

Please let me know how you suggest I proceed.

Kevin

Kevin McCormick  
 Director, Exceptional Student Education  
 School District of Palm Beach County  
 (561) 434-8626

If you do not want your e-mail address released in response to a public records request, do not send electronic mail to this entity. Instead, contact this office by phone or in writing.

Case #: 22-0015-I Date Rcv'd: 1/5/23  
 Received From: McCormick  
 Description: Gmail to OIG from McCormick regarding audit sample  
 Exhibit #: 4  
 Redactions: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X



Case #: 20.0015-I Date Rcv'd: 3-7-23

Received From: Brooks

Description: Mail from Brooks

Exhibit #: 5

Redactions: Yes  No 

Veronica Vallecillo &lt;veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org&gt;

**(no subject)**

1 message

**Brian Brooks** <brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org>  
 To: Veronica Vallecillo <veronica.vallecillo@palmbeachschools.org>  
 Cc: "Dan, Melissa" <melissa.dan@floridaea.org>

Tue, Mar 7, 2023 at 12:48 PM

Good afternoon Ms. Vallecillo, Investigator

Please be advised that my Palm Beach County CTA Union Labor Representative, Melissa Dan is copied on this correspondence. As a CTA Professional Contracted teacher and CTA member, I am given this representation. I request that any correspondence be put into writing and include Ms. Dan.

This is in response to our conversation on 2/2/23 at Woodlands Middle. In our conversation you had inquiries in regards to meetings held on (2) separate dates. You inquired how it was possible to have more than the number of meetings I had previously stated I had daily. The number I provided was an average and some days it is more and some days it is less. As explained, I have an extremely large ESE population (possibly the largest in the county) for a middle school and I am unable to recall the details of each meeting or the specifics.

You began referring to EdPlan dates and documents along with if my google calendar reflects the meetings. EdPlan is a document housing and does not necessarily give you the complete IEP process of a student. I explained that EdPlan has been up and running for a few years and has been an adjustment and a continued on-going trial and error. I explained that documents occasionally get created that should not have gotten created and that the ESE Contact is not able to delete them and it's an IT district process. I myself continue on a daily basis learning and finding mistakes made by myself and ESE teachers in a very complex system. Place that on the overwhelming responsibility and daily demand on the ESE contact errors and mistakes do happen as well as requesting to delete files from EdPlan as it is low on the to-do-list and often gets forgotten.

Not being able to recall on the spot details for a specific meeting (I hold over 300 a year) and not having the time to properly review a file in order to provide details I am providing the details below. I am leaving names/#'s out as it is private confidential student information.

██████████ - the EdPlan document was created by mistake on 1/28/2022 and should be deleted. As explained, I am unable to delete the documents and must put in a IT EdPlan ticket. There would not be a copy in the file as it was not part of the students IEP process. The one particular document that needs to be deleted doesn't even have teachers names at this school. The students Reeval Planning/Determination happened on 10/17/2022. PPF went home on 9/23/22 and my google calendar reflects that meeting.

██████████ - the last reeval planning/determination was done at ██████████ on 1/14/19. The student had a complete reevaluation done in 2018. IEP's were done on 11/10/20, 10/14/21, 10/26/22 (parent in attendance). Reeval planning/determination should have occurred at the 10/13/21 IEP. Team did it after. Reeval planning/determination was completed on 1/26/22 with parents via phone with no recommendation for any reevaluations due to the fact it was just done on 2018. Signature page in file.

██████████ - IEP/Reeval Planning/Reeval Elg done on 1/78/22. Parents DID attend and signature pages are in file. Google calendar reflects these 3 EdPlan parts of the meeting.

██████████ - team did IEP and Reevaluation meeting on 2/10/2021 (document created 2/17/21 in EdPlan. By error not knowing how to do the final Reeval Elg in EdPlan only one document was created for the Reevaluation. Documents 891808 and 891842 on 1/28/2022 were created by mistake and an IT ticket needs to be placed to delete. This is why they DO NOT appear on the calendar as it was not a meeting. Team will correct at the next IEP. Testing EdPlan to figure out how it works. IEP and Reeval planning and Reeval eligibility were done on 2/8/2022 to update IEP and correct the Reeval error.

EdPlan is a great resource for looking up and housing documents. We are still required to keep a hard copy file of the IEP process. It is difficult to look at EdPlan and Google calendar for an insight into an ESE process. As we evolve and become more sophisticated in EdPlan that may not still hold in years. You asked about scanning signatures into EdPlan to prove a meeting had happened... I truly wish I had the time to even think about doing something like that. I am one individual with a huge amount of responsibility and demand placed on me daily. I hold approximately 280 IEP meetings, parent conferences, answer about 10-15 parent emails daily, take a minimum of 5-10 parent calls a day, perform morning and afternoon care line duty, lunch duty, monitor ESE staff schedules, hire and maintain paraprofessionals, daily assist with paraprofessional coverage, cover classes when short, attend SBT, attend and supervise after school events, fill in as behavior coverage to support teachers in classrooms, find time for the overwhelming creation of scheduling and creating notices for IEP meetings, etc. I start my day by 7:30am and end it at 4:30 and work continuously through the day. My contractual day is supposed to be 8:40 to 4:05 with 1 planning period per day and a 30-minute lunch. In order to get things done I must work evenings at home making and taking calls, and on an occasional weekend. I say all this as you have seen my frustration. Being questioned about how I had 10 meetings in one or two days or if case managers are cutting and pasting seems somewhat petty to me.

Also, a meeting listed Reevaluation Planning, and Reevaluation Determination are not 2 separate meetings. Just two separate documents. An IEP, Reeval Planning, and determination all can happen in 1 meeting.

As indicated to you previously I will be moving onto another position at the end of this school year that has nothing to do with ESE. The high demand and responsibility placed on an ESE Contract as one person given minimal assistance and support along with my health issues and the fact that I am counting my remaining years to retirement has made this decision for me.

Thank you for your time. I felt it necessary and important to provide the details of the cases we discussed for your understanding and clarification.

---  
**Brian K. Brooks**  
**Exceptional Student Education Coordinator**  
**Woodlands Middle School**  
***"Home of the Mustangs"***  
(561) 357-0355  
brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org

1a). Copied and pasted present levels and goals from previous years on IEP

Student #	Evidence sections are identical
	No
	No
	Yes
	No
	No
	Yes
	Yes
	Yes
	No
	No
	No
	No
	Yes
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	Yes
	Yes
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	No
	No
	No
	Yes
	Yes
	No
	Yes
	No
	Yes

Case #: 22-0015-J Date Rcv'd: 3/6/23  
 Received From: OIG  
 Description: Analysis of student records related to IEP elections  
 Exhibit #: 6  
 Redactions: Yes X No

Case #: 22-0015-I Date Rcv'd: 3/10/23  
 Received From: 01G  
 Description: Analysis of student records related to PPF's  
 Exhibit #: 7  
 Redactions: Yes  No

1b.) No record of a PPF or the PPF was not provided within the required time-frame

Student #	PPF Issued	Year(s)	Notes
	No	2020	
	No	2020	
	No	2021	
	No	2022	
	No	2021	
	No	2021 & 2022	
	No	2022	
	Yes	2022	Generated on 4/6/22. However the document reflects a date of notice of 4/1/22
	No	2020 & 2022	
	Yes	2022	Generated on same day as meeting
	Yes	2020	Generated same day as meeting
	No	2022	
	No	2022	
	No	2020	
	No	2022	
	No	2020	
	No	2020	
	No	2022	
	No	2021	
	Yes	2020	PPF generated on 11/6/20 for a 11/11/20 meeting (5 days)
	No	2020	
	No	2020	
	No	2021	
	Yes	2020	Generated same day as meeting
	No	2021	
	No	2021 & 2022	
	No	2021	
	No	2020	
	No	2022	
	Yes	2022	Generated on 4/11/22 for a 4/18/22 meeting (7 days). Note the notice had a date of notice of 5/12/21
	No	2022	
	No	2021	
	Yes	2022	Generated same day as meeting
	No	2020	



1c.) Not ensuring IEP compliance in relation to all required team members present for meetings

Student #	SLP Services	SLP Listed on IEP	SLP Listed on PPF	Meeting Date	Notes
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	None Generated	09/22/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	10/14/22	IEP meeting notes mention SLP discussed services. List from complainant reflected "meeting was held in October and SLP was not invited; SLP walked into ESE office to return the student's file and meeting was being held - ESE contact then sent an invite so SLP could participate.
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	12/01/22	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	02/26/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	None Generated	09/28/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	02/24/22	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	03/10/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	None Generated	11/17/20	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	02/08/22	SLP said she did not attend meeting although she is listed. On 4/29/22 an IEP was generated reflecting 2/8/22 date, SLP is not listed.
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	09/21/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	None Generated	09/17/20	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	04/05/22	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	None Generated	05/17/21	
[REDACTED]	Yes	No	Not listed	02/25/21	

Case #: 22-0015-I Date Rcv'd: 3/16/23  
 Received From: OTIS  
 Description: Analysis of student records related to team member attendance  
 Exhibit #: 8  
 Redactions: Yes X No

1d.) Falsified reevaluation meeting documents

Student #	Reevaluation Planning Date	PPF Generated	Reevaluation Determination Date	PPF Generated	Attendance Record Conflict	Calendar Entry	Notes
	01/26/22	No	01/27/22	No		No record located	
	01/26/22	No	01/27/22	No		No record located	This student was discussed with Brooks during interview. Subsequently, on 3/7/23 Brooks provided the OIG with the following via email: "the last reeval planning/determination was done at [redacted] on 1/14/19. The student had a complete reevaluation done in 2018. IEP's were done on 11/10/20, 10/14/21, 10/26/22 (parent in attendance). Reeval planning/determination should have occurred at the 10/13/21 IEP. Team did it after. Reeval planning/determination was completed on 1/26/22 with parents via phone with no recommendation for any reevaluations due to the fact it was just done on 2018. Signature page in file."
	01/26/22	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	01/26/22	No	01/28/22	No	PS records reflect a sick entry for one of the team members on 1/26/22	No record located	
	01/26/22	No	01/26/22	No		No record located	
	N/A	N/A	01/26/22	No		No record located	
	01/12/22	No	01/26/22	No		No record located	
	01/26/22	No	01/26/22	No	PS records reflect a sick entry for one of the team members on 1/26/22	No record located	
	11/17/20	No	01/26/22	No		No record located	EdPlan reflects the Planning document was generated on 1/31/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 11/17/20.
	N/A	N/A	01/26/22	No		No record located	
	N/A	N/A	01/26/22	No		No record located	
	01/28/22	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	01/28/22	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	11/30/20	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	EdPlan reflects the Planning document was generated on 1/31/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 11/30/20.
	N/A	N/A	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	N/A	N/A	01/28/22	No		No record located	EdPlan determination document reflects staff from student's previous school. This student was discussed with Brooks during interview. Subsequently, on 3/7/23 Brooks provided the OIG with the following via email: "the EdPlan document was created by mistake on 1/28/2022 and should be deleted. As explained, I am unable to delete the documents and must put in a IT EdPlan ticket. There would not be a copy in the file as it was not part of the students IEP process. The one particular document that needs to be deleted doesn't even have teachers names at this school. The students Reeval Planning/Determination happened on 10/17/2022. PPF went home on 9/23/22 and my google calendar reflects that meeting."
	11/30/20	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	EdPlan reflects the Planning document was generated on 1/31/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 11/30/20.
	10/11/21	No	01/28/22	No		District records reflect a calendar entry for student	
	11/13/20	Yes	01/28/22	No	PS records reflect a sick entry for team members on 11/13/20 and 1/28/22	No record located	EdPlan reflects the Planning document was generated on 1/28/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 11/13/20.
	01/28/22	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	01/28/22	No	01/28/22	No		No record located	
	N/A	N/A	01/28/22	No		No record located	It should be noted EdPlan reflects an IEP meeting dated 1/25/22. PPF sent for 1/25/22 meeting. Calendar invite on record for 1/25/22.
	01/25/22	Yes	01/28/22	No		District records reflect a calendar entry for student	
	01/31/22	No	01/31/22	No		No record located	
	01/31/22	No	01/31/22	No	PS records reflect a without pay entry for one of the team members on 1/31/22	No record located	
	12/01/20	No	11/15/21	No		No record located	EdPlan reflects the Planning document was generated on 1/31/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 12/1/20. EdPlan reflects the Determination document was generated on 1/31/22. However, the document reflects a meeting date of 11/15/21.

Case #: 22-0015-I Date Rcv'd: 3-16-23  
 Received From: OTG  
 Description: Analysis of student records related to reevaluations  
 Exhibit #: 9  
 Redactions: Yes X No

Case #: 22-00151 Date Rcv'd: 5-1-23  
Received From: B. Brooks  
Description: Response to  
draft report  
Exhibit #: 10  
Redactions: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

May 1, 2023

OIG Case Number 22-001501 Response

This is my response to the above OIG Case Number. I will address the allegations 1b. and 1c. that you have Substantiated. I will not respond nor elaborate on false allegations 1a. and 1d. as you have properly indicated are Unsubstantiated.

Allegation 1b., Ms. Croll in her audit produced 34 files that did not have a PPF provided for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. Within that time period, an estimate 750 PPF's would have needed to be created for meetings (equivalent to a less than .05% error). Even though a PPF may not have been created it is not an indication that parents were not provided notice via google meet invite, or phone call.

Allegation 1c, as stated in my interview I admitted at times due to an overwhelming work load and scheduling a large number of meetings a service member was mistakenly left off of a meeting, especially if a related service provider. An ESE teacher and General Education teacher were always invited.

Neither 1b. or 1c. were intentional but an oversight. The ESE Coordinator has a great deal of responsible and duties and oversights and mistakes unintentionally occurred.

The vague statement of the 18 students not receiving services. Was she referring to students not placed in proper educational services as evidence on the master board, or was she referring to speech/language/PT/OT services?

Throughout the period of time Ms. Croll was assigned to Woodlands Middle as a part-time SLP there were numerous complaints along with several personality conflicts with multiple staff. I attempted to address this with Ms. Croll and it did not turn out to be a constructive conversation. In January, 2022 I had reached out to Suzette Gingold, her supervisor to discuss the concerns. A meeting was scheduled for February 16, 2022 with myself, Woodland's administration and Allison Ahern to address these concerns and find a solution. \*\* Please note that Suzette Gingold's statement in her interview (pg 10) indicated that meeting was to address me was completely false. I have attached a copy of our email correspondence. This meeting as well was not constructive but Suzette was to speak with Ms. Croll about the schools concerns. After this meeting the relationships with Ms. Croll along with her inability to work with myself and others on our team.

The statement made by Stealey on page 10 that her and Croll reviewed all of the ESE student files at Woodlands must would taken a considerable amount of time. My initial thought was the confidentiality of student records and accessing students records either of the are attached nor services for speech/language therapy. My next thought was that schools were just coming out of a historic time in education with the Covid epidemic where students where either not present or sitting at home in a virtual environment. Along with students, schools were dealing with record numbers of teacher's shortages. As the schools began there dig out and begin the transition back to normal, she was concerned with auditing the records during that time. I felt she should have been spending time making

up services and providing additional support to students who legitimately were very far behind. Not sure her priorities were in good judgement.

At no time were students services and needs not being provided by Woodlands Middle School. In fact, we have always taken pride in knowing we do our best to service and put our students first. Within my tenure in this position, we have received minimal complaints and a great deal of praise from our parents. The concerning part of all is effort is the fact no one included showing me the documentation or had a conversation with me about the issues being stated. I would have welcomed looking into it the matter and being given assistance, suggestions and feedback to make the process better or correct and avoid errors in the future.

As advised, this is my last year as ESE Coordinator. I am excited to continue my service in a different role for the SY23/24 school year. In my tenure at Woodlands, I have been fortunate to work with some of the most supportive and admirable administration and teachers in education. I would like to highly encourage the School District ESE Department to ensure support and assistance on the school campus.

With Regard,

Brian K. Brooks

cc: Melissa Dan, Labor Relations, CTA



Brian Brooks <brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org>

**Concern**  
5 messages

**Brian Brooks** <brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org> Fri, Jan 21, 2022 at 2:32 PM  
To: Suzette Gingold <suzette.gingold@palmbeachschools.org>, Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org>

Hello Suzette,

I have some feedback about 2 of our SLP's to discuss with you. I'm including Allison as I've spoken to her about it and also my Principal.

Let me know a good time the 3 of us can chat. Appreciate it. Hope all is well with you.

-  
**Brian K. Brooks**  
Exceptional Student Education Coordinator  
Woodlands Middle School  
"Home of the Mustangs"  
(561) 357-0355  
brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org

**Suzette Gingold** <suzette.gingold@palmbeachschools.org> Fri, Jan 21, 2022 at 3:37 PM  
To: Brian Brooks <brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org>  
Cc: Allison Ahern <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org>

Hello Brian-

I can be available for a "Meet" on:

- 1. Monday, January 24th between 10:30-11:45A
- 2. Tuesday, January 25th from 3:30-4:00P
- 3. Wednesday, January 26th from 3:30-4:00P

I'll look forward to hearing from you.

*Suzette*

[Quoted text hidden]

**Allison Ahern** <allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org> Mon, Jan 24, 2022 at 8:18 AM  
To: Suzette Gingold <suzette.gingold@palmbeachschools.org>  
Cc: Brian Brooks <brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org>

Good morning and Happy Monday:)  
Unfortunately, I am not available any of those times.  
Thank you

**Allison Ahern, M. Ed.**  
ESE Resource Teacher  
School District of Palm Beach County

4/21/23, 8:03 AM

School District of Palm Beach County Mail - Concern

Department of Exceptional Student Education  
Office Phone: (561) 731-2879  
Email: [allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)

[Quoted text hidden]

Brian Brooks <[brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org)>  
To: Allison Ahern <[allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)>

Mon, Jan 24, 2022 at 8:22 AM

Well fine. LOL. It's no biggie.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DARLING.



[Quoted text hidden]

Allison Ahern <[allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)>  
To: Brian Brooks <[brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:brian.brooks@palmbeachschools.org)>

Mon, Jan 24, 2022 at 8:23 AM

Haha, thanks!  
I'm sorry!!!!!!

**Allison Ahern, M. Ed.**  
ESE Resource Teacher  
School District of Palm Beach County

4/21/23, 8:03 AM

School District of Palm Beach County Mail - Concern

Department of Exceptional Student Education

Office Phone: (561) 731-2879

Email: [allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org](mailto:allison.ahern@palmbeachschools.org)

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