



## **School Annual Education Report (AER) Cover Letter**

February 1, 2024

Dear Parents and Community Members:

We are pleased to present you with the Annual Education Report (AER), which provides key information on the 2023 educational progress for The Berrien Springs Virtual Academy. The AER addresses the complex reporting information required by federal and state laws. The school's report contains information about student assessment, accountability, and teacher quality. If you have any questions about the AER, please contact Valerie Carr for assistance.

The AER is available for you to review electronically by visiting the following website <https://bit.ly/2WrOUJL>, or you may review a copy in the main office at your child's school.

For the 2023-24 school year, schools were identified based on previous years' performance using definitions and labels as required in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) school is one that had at least one underperforming student subgroup in 2022-2023. An Additional Targeted Support (ATS) school is one that had a student subgroup performing at the same level as the lowest 5% of all schools in the state in 2022-2023. A Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school is one whose performance was in the lowest 5% of all schools in the state or had a graduation rate at or below 67% in 2022-23. Some schools are not identified with any of these labels. In these cases, no label is given.

Our school was not identified as a "TSI," "ATS," or "CSI" school. The Berrien Springs Virtual Academy serves families who are interested in a homeschool feel coupled with the rigor, support, and accountability provided by a traditional school. The school provides highly qualified teachers on campus and online. The challenges in this setting are communication, goal setting, and support services. The Virtual Academy is in the process of addressing these challenges in the following ways:

In the area of communication, the school sends out mass communication via School Messenger and Smore, newsletters, and automated progress reports on a weekly basis via email. In addition, teachers communicate with students through phone, email, online meetings, and face to face workshops. To assist students in setting goals, the Virtual Academy meets with individual students and/or families to view/review goals. The guidance includes progressions towards graduation as well as college and career goal setting.

The Virtual Academy, in concert with Berrien Springs Public Schools provides various support



services. Services provided at the Virtual Academy include writers workshops, SAT Prep classes, mentoring, and reading and math intervention when applicable in each content class. Through other buildings, the school provides special education services, counseling services, and extensions such as electives, dual enrollment, and career courses.

State law requires we also report additional information.

1. The Virtual Academy accepts both district residents and schools of choice students. Course placement is determined in two ways: parent input and transcripts from previous schools.
2. The Virtual Academy is a K-12<sup>th</sup> grade seat time waiver program. Students have the option of working from home with mentoring sessions as needed. Students are required to come into the building for tests and exams.

Students in 6th-12th grade primarily use <http://edgenuity.com>. Students are permitted to work from home or on campus. Parents serve as motivational coaches but may rely on teachers to provide academic support. For additional elective opportunities, students also have access to Michigan Virtual, Typing, and Dave Ramsey curriculum for virtual programming along with electives offered through the Berrien Springs Home School Partnership and on-campus elective courses.

3. K - 5th grade students work from home using Lincoln Learning Curriculum. Students work with parents at home. The parents serve as the primary coach and receive feedback from our certified elementary teacher. Assessments are proctored in person at the Virtual Academy building. Students have access to all curriculum 24/7.
4. The Virtual Academy is focused on growth. Growth data is often skewed due to the transient nature of this program with students switching into the building, back to brick and mortar schools, along with school of choice students at semester or those entering and exiting as a result of the Alternative Education qualifier.
5. Over the last two years, greater than 70% of families have attended parent teacher conferences.
6. 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students of the Virtual Academy:
  - a. 90% of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students participate in dual enrollment classes through Lake Michigan College, Southwestern Michigan College, and Andrews University OR Career and Technical Education offered through the county.
  - b. In the last two years, 95% of students who attempt college courses earn college credit.



**Special Education AER**  
**2023-2024 School Year**

Resident students (along with students accepted through the schools of choice process) may qualify and have a need for special education programs and/or services. The district is continuing to develop their Multi-Tier Systems of Supports (MTSS) model, providing general education options for students needing additional support through interventions and monitoring their progress over time. For those students who are unable to demonstrate progress with significant interventions, students being referred for special education programming/services may begin this process through a request for an evaluation or Child Study Team (CST) meeting. Should a student qualify for special education programs and/or services under one of the thirteen eligibility areas in Michigan, a team of individuals will develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to help assist the child progress within the general education setting. Programming and services offered within the district for students are as follows-

**A. Resource Room Services for Local Special Education Students**

Part of the IEP process includes the determination of appropriate aids, supplementary services, accommodations, and modifications for success in general education. Current special education programs within the district include, but are not limited to, Elementary and Secondary Resource Rooms. Students follow a general education curriculum with the Common Core State Standards. There are two models utilized within Berrien Springs Public Schools, one in which classroom instruction is provided by a general education teacher along with interactive co-teaching from a special education teacher; the second model is for students determined to need more direct instruction for needs outlined within their IEP. Under this model, students may receive programming/services that pull them out of the general education classroom for a set amount of time dictated by their IEP. Should a student at our Discovery Academy or Virtual Academy programs have a need for Resource Room programming or services outlined in their IEP, such programs and services can and will be provided. Specialized instruction at the Discovery Academy and Virtual Academy programs can be provided in-person at either our middle or high school buildings. At the elementary level approximately sixty-one students receive Elementary Resource Room programming; fifty-seven secondary students receive Secondary Resource Room programming.



### **B. Center-Based Special Education Programs**

Berrien Springs hosts several center-based programs for Berrien County RESA. These programs are housed in Berrien Springs and operated by Berrien Springs Public Schools. The funding comes through federal, state and Berrien RESA sources. Many of the students in these programs are not residents of Berrien Springs, but are able to take advantage of these center programs through the IEP (Individual Educational Program) process in conjunction with their resident districts. Transportation to and from Berrien Springs is provided through the local resident district. These programs include:

#### **1. Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Classrooms, Teacher Consultant Services, Audiological Services:**

Students with hearing impairments have been part of Berrien Springs Public Schools for approximately 50 years. Cass County contracts services through Berrien RESA allowing students to enroll from both Cass and Berrien counties. Babies are frequently identified at birth and start receiving intervention services at a very early age with teacher consultants seeing families in their homes. Classroom services are available for pre-school through high school aged students. These students may also participate in general education classes. Approximately 18 Berrien and Cass County students receive direct services in the classroom program, three students are residents of Berrien Springs.

Many students who are Deaf or hard of hearing function very well in their home district classrooms while receiving indirect assistance from a teacher consultant and/or audiologist for equipment purposes. Approximately 70 children receive equipment services (IFSP, IEP, and 504), including ten (10) students from Berrien Springs.

Two educational audiologists provide audiological services and equipment management for students with identified hearing loss through our Hearing Center for students in Berrien, Cass, and Saint Joseph counties. They also provide diagnostic information for children with diagnosed, fluctuating, suspected or possible hearing losses. They work with physicians, the Health Department, families, Build up Michigan, Early On, and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) to



diagnose children as soon as possible and get amplification and intervention started. The team of audiologists work with over 500 students each year.

2. **Severe Language Impaired Preschool Program:**

Students in the SLI preschool room receive instruction from a highly qualified teacher having endorsements in Elementary Education, speech and language impairments, and who is also a licensed speech and language pathologist. A maximum of 15 students ages three to six years of age must meet specific requirements to be considered for this county-based program. To qualify, students must demonstrate severe or moderate-to-severe delays in at least two areas of speech and language. During the 2023-24 school year, two (2) Berrien Springs resident students are enrolled in this classroom with a total of 15 students overall from Berrien county. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of their local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

3. **Middle School Mildly Cognitively Impaired Classrooms:**

The district operates two county-wide classrooms at Berrien Springs Middle School for students functioning with mild cognitive impairments. The program incorporates reading, writing, and vocabulary with social studies and science topics, following the Extended Grade Level Content Expectations from Michigan Department of Education. Currently, 16 students are being serviced within these county classrooms. This school year, three (3) students considered to be Berrien Springs resident students are IEP placed in these rooms. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

4. **High School Mildly Cognitively Impaired Classroom:**

A county-wide classroom for students functioning with a mild cognitive impairment is also housed within the high school and taught by a teacher of the cognitively impaired. The students work through a series of objectives that are linked to the Extended Grade Level Content Expectations and daily living skills for transition to post-secondary goals. Students also receive instruction through the use of the Life Centered Curriculum and earn a Seal of Employability upon completion of the program. This



program also includes pre-vocational and vocational experiences. Since the focus is not on the Michigan Merit Curriculum required for a high school diploma in Michigan, the students receive a certificate of completion. They do participate in the high school graduation ceremony. Students also have the option of participating in CTE programs within the county. There are a total of 17 students enrolled in the classroom presently, with 8 students being considered Berrien Springs residents. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

**C. Ancillary Services:**

Ancillary services are available for students who qualify. These services may include speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or consultation from service providers such as vision, orientation & mobility, or assistive technology consultants.

Approximately 181 students receive speech and language services from Berrien Springs speech and language pathologists. Fifty-seven students receive OT and/or PT services from Berrien RESA OT/PTs.

**D. Build Up Michigan:**

Build Up Michigan: Berrien Springs provides both evaluations and services for resident students ages three-five through the Build Up Michigan program. Evaluation plans determined for children through Build Up Michigan referrals are considered full and individual evaluations. Any programs/services offered are developed with the IEP planning team and evaluation team to meet the unique needs of each student.

**E. Specialized Programs for Students Available Outside of Berrien Springs District:**

Some students need programs that are not offered within the district. The IEP process is used to make this determination and to place these students in appropriate programs that offer the specialized instruction necessary to meet their goals and objectives. Transportation is provided for these students. These programs include:

1. **Blossomland Learning Center, Berrien Regional Education Service Agency, Berrien Springs, Michigan**





The purpose of Blossomland Learning Center is to provide services to students who have been diagnosed as moderately to severely cognitively impaired, up through age 26, who reside within the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency. The school assists students in preparing for entry into their respective communities. Twelve (12) Berrien Springs resident students are attending this program during the 2023-24 school year. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

2. **Lighthouse Education Center, Berrien Regional Education Service Agency, St. Joseph, Michigan (including satellite locations)**

The Lighthouse Education Center program is operated as a therapeutic and educational program for students diagnosed as having an Emotional Impairment or Autism Spectrum Disorder up to age 26 and residing within the Berrien Regional Education Service Agency. These students may exhibit severe emotional difficulties or be students with significant challenges presented by autism spectrum disorder and require a specialized educational setting. During the 2023-24 school year, six (6) Berrien Springs Public School District resident(s) attend these programs at Lighthouse and in their satellite classrooms throughout the county. These satellite classrooms include locations at Saint Joseph High School, The Center for Growth and Independence, and Howard Ellis Elementary.

3. **Niles Community Schools, Niles, Michigan (EI, MICI, ECSE Programs)**

Niles Community Schools operates countywide center-based programs for low incidence special education students needing a full-time placement.

The program for the Emotionally Impaired includes students with severe emotional or behavioral problems. These students receive a very strict, highly structured program designed to change inappropriate behavior patterns and allow learning to take place. Expectations for performance are high with the goal being the student's successful readmission to their resident district. Classroom programs serve students ages 6 through 26 in buildings such as Ballard Elementary and Southside. In the 2023-24



school year there are seven (7) students from Berrien Springs that attend these programs. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

Students in the Pre-Vocational program or Cognitively Impaired programs have below average ability levels, making success in their local high schools extremely difficult. Often their low ability is compounded by a weak self-concept and inadequate social skills. Programs are located at both Niles High School and Southside, some students may pursue a diploma, but most will follow a curriculum designed to promote independent living with a Seal of Employability. Classrooms are available to serve ages 16 through 25. There are presently no Berrien Springs students enrolled in the 16-25 pre-vocational program in Niles. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff.

Niles Community Schools also has an elementary program for cognitive impairments (K-2). There were no resident students placed in the classroom for students at Ballard Elementary in Niles in the 2023-24 school year.

During the 2023-24 school year, six (6) students from Berrien Springs attend Early Childhood Special Education programs at Northside in Niles, Michigan. Students are placed in the program through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff. This half day preschool program serves students ages 3-6 and includes ancillary services such as speech/language, occupation, and physical therapy.

**4. Mild Cognitively Impaired Classrooms, Lakeshore Public Schools, Stevensville, Michigan**

Lakeshore Public Schools provide county-based programs for students with cognitive impairments in grades K-12. Students are placed in these programs through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff. In the 2023-24 school year, three (3) Berrien





Springs resident students were placed in a K-2 or 3-5 classroom for students with mild cognitive impairments, housed in Lakeshore, at either Stewart or Hollywood Elementary.

5. **Elementary Mild Cognitively Impaired Classroom, Watervliet Public Schools, Watervliet, MI**

Watervliet Public Schools provide a county-based program for students with cognitive impairments in grades 3-5. Students are placed in these programs through an Individual Educational Planning Committee composed of local district and Berrien RESA diagnostic and educational staff. There are currently no Berrien Springs resident students IEP placed into this classroom in the 2023-24 school year.

6. **Juvenile Center, Berrien Springs, Michigan**

The juvenile center has programming for students with disabilities that are court placed, for an amount of time determined by a judge, with the goal being eventual re-integration into the resident district's educational system. Any students currently placed at the juvenile center are considered Berrien Springs residents during their placement there and the district is involved in their special education planning.

The Berrien Springs Virtual Academy is proud of the students and families engaging in our program and the opportunities it provides for continued personal and academic growth.

Sincerely,

*Valeio L. Carr*

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