

**Lee County School District
Exit Criteria Survey Summary
February 2026**

This report provides an overview of the Lee County School District's progress and current readiness for exit, informed by an in-depth review of district practices and stakeholder perspectives. The narratives synthesize notes collected by each team member, anchored in interviews with staff and students, thorough document review, and on-site observations. The summary assesses the district's performance across five key indicators. After conducting interviews, indicator ratings were gathered and averaged according to the rubric detailed below. These quantitative assessments, alongside qualitative analyses, serve as the foundation for the findings outlined in this report.

Background of Lee County School District

On March 25, 2019, the State Board of Education found Lee County School District and Lee High School to be in probationary violation of the Rules Governing the Standards for Accreditation (Sections 1-C.2.1 and 1-C.2.2 respectively). The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recommended to the State Board of Education (SBE) that the Board place the District and Lee High School on probationary status for these violations. The District appealed the Department's determination; however, the SBE did not approve the appeal. Under Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-207(c), the superintendent and school board were removed and the district was placed under state authority.

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1905, the Arkansas Department of Education identified the Lee County School District as a school district in fiscal distress on May 9, 2019. The Arkansas Department of Education made this identification because the Lee County School District met the fiscal distress indicators as set forth in Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1904. The school district, under the leadership of Superintendent Willie Murdock, requested continuation of level 5 support from the SBE on May 13, 2021.

On May 9, 2024, the State Board of Education released Lee County School District from Fiscal Distress. However, the district remains under state authority in continuation of level 5 support. The district continues to receive fiscal monitoring including monthly zoom meetings with Fiscal Services submission of debt requests for all purchases above \$1,000 and providing monthly bank reconciliation.

Lee County Exit Evaluation

In February 2025, the Office of Coordinated Support and Service completed a comprehensive exit evaluation of Lee County. The review concluded that Lee County had made substantial progress, and to facilitate the return to local control, a new advisory board made up of Lee County residents was established. This board is now functioning actively.

This report presents a comparison between last year's evaluation and this year's exit evaluation, which took place in February 2026. The original criteria were designed to meet the district's needs when it was designated as Level 5 support under state supervision. At first, all objectives received scores of 1—Not Attempting.

Rating Scale:

1 - Not Attempting: Has not attempted to develop and implement well-defined, routines and procedures that lead to INDICATOR

2- Beginning: In the beginning, yet incomplete, stages of developing and implementing well-defined, routines and procedures that lead to INDICATOR

3- Developing: Has developed and implemented well-defined, routines and procedures that lead to INDICATOR

4- Applying: Has developed and implemented well-defined routines and procedures that lead to INDICATOR AND can produce concrete results to show the desired effects of these actions.

5- Sustaining: Continually cultivates information through quick data sources to monitor indicator and it takes proper actions to intervene when quick data indicate a potential problem.

Indicator 1- School Safety

The district prioritizes safety, with protocols in place and an onsite assessment by OCSS and the ADE School Safety unit confirming it exceeds exit plan requirements. State law restricts the release of detailed school safety information.

Indicator 2- District Responsibility to Monitor Student Progress

The district has systems in place to monitor student progress at all schools. The analysis ensures each school’s instructional program centers around the collaborative efforts of instructional staff regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, achievement of all students and support for student needs including academics and mental health.

Goal: The district has systems in place to monitor student progress at all schools.

February 2025 Indicator Average	February 2026 Indicator Average
2.60	3.77

Powerful Practices

The district sets clear instructional goals, communicated consistently in leadership meetings. "Monday Roundtable" discussions allow leaders to track progress toward these goals, and weekly tasks align with measurable objectives. Student transitions are prioritized through collaboration among PreK and kindergarten teachers, readiness events, and a spring transition day for sixth graders. Partnerships with Kids for the Future, Great Rivers Educational Service Cooperative, and interpreter services provide targeted support for diverse students.

At the secondary level, leadership aims for 50% of graduates to earn an Associates Degree, Completer Certifications, or 30 transferable prerequisite hours, a goal they will reach with the class of 2026. Freshman and sophomore students are already earning college credits toward this target.

Administrators frequently visit classrooms and are visible throughout the district, with the superintendent actively driving learning expectations. High school programs and concurrent offerings have expanded through partnerships with higher education and businesses. The superintendent is also engaged in the community, presenting to local civic groups.

Areas of Continued Focus

The elementary campus demonstrates robust structural systems, as well as effective behavioral and intervention practices. Although the high school has implemented an intervention framework, it does not exhibit the same degree of consistency. The high school has experienced multiple changes in administration; however, the district is actively providing direct support to the current leadership team.

Indicator 3- School Responsibility for Instructional Expectations

The school system adopts clear goals and instructional expectations and goals originating from a continual review of data. These goals should address all student populations. Systems and processes are in place for all transitions (e.g., pre-K, grade span configurations, career ready pathways based on high demand and high wage/post-secondary/military/career). Roles and responsibilities of school staff are clearly defined and monitored.

Goal: The school system adopts clear goals and instructional expectations originating from the district level.

February 2025 Indicator Average	February 2026 Indicator Average
3.20	3.70

Powerful Practices

The district has achieved significant progress in establishing a comprehensive and responsive student support system across its schools. At the elementary level, an effective Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework is operational, supported by explicit behavior matrices and strengthened through strategic external collaborations that facilitate Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Educators utilize three-week progress monitoring cycles and data tracking tools to refine intervention groups, thereby enabling early identification of academic needs and systematic documentation of student advancement. Furthermore, both campuses efficiently implement “Trojan Time,” which serves as a dedicated intervention and enrichment period informed by ATLAS data, Individual Reading Plans, and Math Improvement Plans. Student achievement is promoted through recognition activities, including verbal acknowledgments, end-of-year incentives, and targeted ATLAS-driven motivational events.

Areas of Continued Focus:

Although districtwide instructional goals have been established, there is variation in their interpretation and enforcement across different classrooms. At the secondary campus, instructional expectations are well defined; however, implementation lacks full consistency with those standards. Consequently, staff comprehension, application, and monitoring of these goals differ, resulting in uneven execution of instructional priorities.

Indicator 4- Educator Growth

The school system recognizes common stages of educator growth from induction through retirement and has developed a plan for professional learning opportunities to support each employee and position with growth opportunities. This includes ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with the district instructional expectations and student achievement data.

Goal: The school system recognizes common stages of educator growth from induction through retirement and has developed a plan for professional learning to support each employee and position with growth opportunities.

February 2025 Indicator Average	February 2026 Indicator Average
2.96	3.35

Powerful Practices

The district is actively enhancing its human capital systems to better support staff. Principals observe classrooms weekly and offer feedback aimed at boosting student engagement, recording their visits in the statewide observation system (EES). Instructional coaches provide professional development, demonstrate lessons, and assist teachers through ongoing coaching cycles. Special education teachers benefit from additional training within the district, and the gifted and talented teacher, who also serves as the elementary math coach, participates in Collaborative Team Meetings (CTMs) at every grade level. CTMs convene two to three times a week with a well-structured framework to maintain process integrity. All staff have Professional Growth Plans (PGPs) and are familiar with their procedures; during our visit, staff reported they were preparing for mid-year PGP reviews.

To attract quality educators, the district has made progress, such as building housing for certified teachers. However, it still faces challenges similar to other rural schools when it comes to filling vacant positions.

Areas of Continued Focus

The PGP process exists, but mid-year reviews remain inconsistent, and staff have few chances to discuss goals with administrators. The district offers new teacher orientation, yet ongoing support for novice teachers is not fully in place.

Indicator 5- High Quality Instructional Materials

The school district curricula are on grade level, includes High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and are aligned to current Arkansas Academic Standards. Literacy materials are on the approved reading material list from DESE. Data from assessments are used to track individual student skill deficits and inform and direct all tiers of instruction.

Goal: The school district curricula are on grade level, includes High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and are aligned to current Arkansas Academic Standards.

February 2025 Average Rating	February 2026 Average Rating
3.6	3.83

Powerful Practices: The district has made substantial investments in High Quality Instructional Material (HQIM), emphasizing professional development and collaborative planning. Teachers participate in continuous training provided by curriculum vendors, such as Curriculum Associates, and benefit from support by district instructional coaches. District leadership maintains an active and visible presence within schools, conducting weekly campus visits and attending Collaborative Team Meetings (CTMs) twice per month. At the elementary level, CTMs are held three times weekly, serving as the primary forum for instructional planning and data analysis. Educators utilize lesson plans, standards, and Common Formative Assessments (CFAs), entering data into a shared tracker to monitor standards-based progress at both the school and district levels. Furthermore, monthly focus walks led by district leadership inform coaching cycles and help shape professional development priorities.

Areas of Continued Focus: Although systems and HQIM are in place, campuses show inconsistent implementation, particularly with pacing guides and supplemental materials. Improving coaching cycles' strength and frequency should remain a priority.

Summary

The district has exhibited substantial progress across all areas. Criteria were developed to address the district's needs when it was designated as Level 5 support and placed under state oversight. Initially, scores for all objectives were assessed at 1—Not Attempting. Over the past several years, Lee County has consistently advanced and now possesses robust systems and structures to sustain continued improvement. Nevertheless, the districts encounter ongoing regional

challenges, such as a shortage of certified teachers. Current objective scores range from 2 to 5, averaging a 3, which satisfies the exit criteria for returning to local governance.

Exit Criteria Indicators	
Scale: 1-Not Attempting 2-Beginning 3- Developing 4-Applying 5- Sustaining	
Indicator 2: The district has systems in place to monitor student progress at all schools. The analysis ensures each school’s instructional program centers around the collaborative efforts of instructional staff regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, achievement of all students and support for student needs including academics and mental health.	3.77
Indicator 3: The school system adopts clear goals and instructional expectations originating from the district level. Schools establish goals aligned with the district. These goals should address all student populations. Systems and processes are in place for all transitions. Roles and responsibilities of school staff are clearly defined and monitored.	3.70
Indicator 4: The school system recognizes common stages of educator growth from induction through retirement and has developed a plan for professional learning opportunities to support each employee and position with growth opportunities. This includes ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with the district instructional expectations and student achievement data.	3.35
Indicator 5: The school district curricula are on grade level, include High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and are aligned to current Arkansas Academic Standards. Literacy materials are on the approved reading material list from DESE. Data from assessments are used to track individual student skill deficits and inform and direct all tiers of instruction.	3.83
Average	3.66