



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Lee County School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

October - December 2021

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

January 2022

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-13-112, a quarterly status report is provided for each school district currently under state authority. The following report is submitted to the State Board of Education, the Chairs of both the House and Senate Education Committees, and others prescribed by law.

The current report is part of quarterly reporting under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Although a district may be under state authority for various purposes, the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) believes that all systems must be fortified in order to have an effective school district. These systems are Academics, Facilities and Transportation, District Operations and Fiscal Governance, Human Capital, Student Support, and Stakeholder Communication/Family and Community Engagement.

The district support plan (DSP) is designed to describe the resources that will be allocated to the individual schools in the district in order to support implementation of the school improvement plan (SIP) and also the manner in which actions within the SIP are monitored by the district. Both the DSP and the SIP are based on the review of data and should follow a continuous cycle of inquiry. The DESE then can work in a collaborative manner to support the district based on items identified in the district plan of support and continue to work with the district to prioritize and identify solutions to further enhance any other systems including the use of DESE supports. DESE will further work with the district to develop local capacity in addressing each system by developing measurable goals and monitoring progress. This is intended to be reflective in nature and a way for DESE and the district to be purposeful in their future work together for the betterment of students.

LEE COUNTY BACKGROUND

On March 25, 2019, the State Board of Education found that the 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 DESE recommended to the State Board 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 State Board of Education 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, on May 9, 2019, the Arkansas Department of Education identified the Lee County School District as a school district in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education made this identification because the Lee County School District met the following fiscal distress indicator(s) as set forth in Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1904. The school district requested continuation of level 5 support from the SBE on May 13, 2021.

Current DESE Quarterly Support of Level 5 Support

October - December 2021

The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Coordinated Support and Service provides direct support to Lee County School District. Assistant State Superintendent, Sheila Whitlow and Leadership Development Coach, Dr. Brent Miller are on site approximately 4 days per week providing support to leadership and coordinating various services to maintain consistency in efforts. Lee County has continued to implement the Professional Learning Communities model and is working closely with PLC coaches. At this time, the coordination of various supports has been pivotal in everyone working together for positive outcomes. Literacy instruction throughout the district remains a priority. Consistent support from Dallas Henderson, ADE RISE specialist and literacy coaches from the Great Rivers Cooperative has continued throughout this first semester. Student and staff engagement at the high school continues to be a priority. The administration has set and communicated instructional expectations for teachers. These expectations are monitored through classroom visits by the building leadership team. The faculty is supportive of the efforts.

Student Support

The Lee County School District is continually working to ensure all students are receiving the services they need to not only meet standards requirements. The high school conducted a transcript audit that included reviewing the transcript of each student enrolled so the school could track the progress each student has made and strategically target those who may have fallen behind and/or need support. A master document was created to track exactly which courses students need to graduate, courses failed, and courses repeated.

This year the district has renewed efforts to implement an effective Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) at both schools. The district has a designated PBIS Coordinator in each building and teams are working to implement it with greater fidelity. Teams from both buildings in the district have attended training with Dr. Ruby Payne and Dr. Weber as well as training focused on the RTI process. The teams have also worked with Solution Tree to tie the work of improving instruction with the work of improving behavior outcomes. Next steps must include bringing the information to the teachers so that students receive the support they need in the classroom.

All students in the district have received level one screeners to identify students exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia. At the high school the data from the Developmental Spelling Analysis and DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency have been used to create small groups for targeted intervention and to identify students that require additional diagnostic assessments. During the daily intervention block second semester, all students will be engaged in word study and in all English Language Arts and Special Education classrooms 4-12 students will receive instruction using the 95% Group Multisyllabic Routine cards. Additional opportunities for word study will occur during the after-school program.

Human Capital

The recruitment and retention of a qualified and sustainable teaching staff continues to be one of the largest obstacles the district faces. Numerous teachers throughout the district are employed through the approved Act 1240 waiver. While there are certified teachers in the district, the disproportionate amount of non-licensed teachers continues to be a clear challenge. The district is taking steps to combat this issue and is fully aware that they must be strategic in the approach of recruiting and retaining a workforce that is of high quality.

The district created a partnership with a university in the region to allow pre-service teachers to come on site to teach for a day and use what they are learning in the university setting to design learning environments in the district. This allows university students to see the district and begin to form a relationship with local education entities while giving the district the opportunity to host prospective teachers. The hope is to expand this effort and allow more future teachers to visit the district and have a greater reach. In addition, the leadership plans to work with an international recruitment agency to bring quality, certified teachers to the district. Educator Rising will begin during the second semester and will be led by the superintendent as part of a grow-your-own effort. In addition, the district is in the design phase of Opportunity Culture with a long range goal of extending the reach of excellent teachers to more of the district's scholars. As they continue to explore how to best attain a quality workforce, finding ways to have a strategic advantage will be of the utmost importance. It is apparent that the Lee County School District sees the need for a strong, viable human capital pool and will continue to work to overcome the struggle faced by so many districts, particularly those that are rural and have high poverty populations.

The pandemic cannot be ignored as the district has been directly impacted through the loss of staff and close family members. Filling vacant positions and finding substitutes for those on sick or bereavement leave pose additional challenges for district and building leadership. Currently, the company contracted to provide substitute teachers has secured one individual to substitute when teachers are absent. As a result, faculty and staff at both schools have been called upon to help cover classes. The willingness to assist as needed is a reflection of the team-like culture observed in the district.

Academics

Student data from a variety of sources are displayed and analyzed in designated rooms at both campuses. The information is used for grouping students for targeted interventions as well as tracking progress for celebrations or modifying plans if progress is not made. District and building curriculum and instructional leaders meet regularly to debrief following focus walks, provide updates, identify specific curricular needs and plan targeted support for teachers. Through the coordination of support from external vendors, cooperative specialists, DESE and OCSS, the staff, teachers and leaders are receiving job embedded professional development and assistance as needed. That being said, there is room for improvement when it comes to teaching to the rigor of the standards, scaffolding instruction so that students can access grade level material and effectively preparing and planning for content delivery.

Both schools have time built in the master schedule for interventions and both have after-school programs that are targeting learning loss in the areas of math and literacy. Pre- and post-assessments will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of services and inform plans for future programs.

All literacy programs and curricular materials purchased by the district align with the science of reading. At Anna Strong Learning Academy, Heggerty, FunDations, and iReady are being implemented. During the spring semester, teachers in grades 4-6 will add Just Words and 95% Group Multisyllabic Routine Cards to the word study portion of the literacy block schedule. At the high school, ELA teachers use My Perspectives as their primary resource and in the second semester will add 95% Group Multisyllabic Routine Cards to the first 15 minutes of the block schedule. Because many of the teachers are new to the district or to their assigned grade level and the materials are newly purchased, ongoing professional development and implementation support will be needed.

Family and Community Engagement

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the district has seen a vast increase in the use of social media to communicate with the school and community. This option has proven to be a safe and effective means for reaching stakeholders on a regular basis. Moreover, the district has made an effort to ensure that monthly newsletters are more robust since large, in-person gatherings are not as feasible in the community. To better engage the community and families, the district has strategically utilized funds from the American Rescue Plan to design after-school programming. This has allowed for families in the community to have a safe place to send their children after school while also addressing learning gaps due to the pandemic.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

The district has contracted with Arkansas Public School Resource Center (APSRC) to provide assistance with financial transactions and the development of the annual budget. The development and implementation of standard operating procedures in an effort to streamline financial transactions and promote proactive responses to deadlines is a target for this year.

Arkansas law sets forth a clear process for school districts to follow in order to remove themselves from fiscal distress classification. Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1908, a school district in fiscal distress may only petition the State Board of Education for removal from fiscal distress status after the Arkansas Department of Education certifies in writing that the school district has corrected all criteria for being classified as in fiscal distress and has complied with all department recommendations and requirements for removal from fiscal distress status.

The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education will continue to work with Lee County School District to correct all criteria for being classified as in fiscal distress. Direct technical support from the ADE fiscal unit is provided regularly to assist the school district.

Objective 1: Develop and maintain a district budget aligned to annual funding amounts.

Action	Completion Date
The district will create a district budget that aligns to revenue on the State Aid Notice.	September 30 th of each year
The district will budget all Foundation Funds in fund 2000.	September 30 th of each year
The amount of Foundation Funding budgeted for salaries will not exceed 85% of the current year foundation fund revenue.	September 30 th of each year
The district will ensure that money is available in budget line items prior to submitting a request to incur debt.	Daily
The district will maintain a net legal balance as required by law.	September 30 th of each year

Objective 2: Comply with required financial reporting.

Action	Completion Date
The district will submit all cycle reports by the deadline and retain printed or electronic copies in the district office.	As Outlined in the SIS Cycle Reporting Manual
The district will submit monthly required financial reports/documents to DESE Fiscal Services Office.	15 th of each Month
The district will submit all required reports/budgets by the deadline to the proper agencies.	As Required by Deadlines

Objective 3: Create a facilities and transportation maintenance plan that promotes efficiency and aligns with the annual budget.

Action	Completion Date
The district will review the condition of buses and implement a plan for future purchases or leases.	October 15, 2021
The district will review the condition of all buildings and create a plan for needed improvements that aligns to the annual budget.	October 15, 2021
The district will create and implement daily/weekly maintenance plans to ensure the district provides a safe and orderly environment.	Daily

Objective 4: Implement financial practices to prevent future audit findings.

Action	Completion Date
In collaboration with DESE, the district will create and implement a written plan approved by ADE for internal control processes.	January 15, 2022
The district will conduct and document a physical inventory check annually.	September 15 th of each year
The superintendent will open and document a monthly review of the bank statement.	Monthly
The superintendent will approve and maintain documentation of all journal entries by period.	Monthly