



## DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

# **Pine Bluff School District**

## **Legislative Quarterly Report**

January - March 2023

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner

April 2023

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.

## **PINE BLUFF BACKGROUND**

On September 13, 2018, the Pine Bluff School District (PBSD) was classified as in Fiscal Distress. The State Board of Education voted to remove the school board and superintendent and the district was placed under state authority. Five of the six schools in Pine Bluff had a letter grade of an F. The district also had four schools identified in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). On November 8, 2018, the Pine Bluff School District was classified in need of Level 5 Support and state authority was reaffirmed by the SBE.

The Dollarway School District was officially annexed on July 1, 2021 into the Pine Bluff School District. All schools within the previous Dollarway School District remained open and now operate as part of the Pine Bluff school district and policies.

### **Current DESE Quarterly Report**

The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Coordinated Support and Service provides direct support to Pine Bluff School District. Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner, and Eric Saunders, EdD, Assistant State Superintendent serve as support for the superintendent. Leadership Development Coach, Ryan Burgess is on-site 1-2 days per week providing support to leadership and coordinating various services. Behavior Specialist, Dr. Michael Watson, and Leadership Development Coach, Julie Amstutz are on campus 1-2 days a week to provide district support regarding student services. Crystal Green-Braswell, Leadership Development Coach, is on-site at least one day a week providing principal support. Jamie Reid, OCSS Fiscal Support, is on-site at least one day a week directly supporting the business manager and business office. Alicia Whiteside, DESE RISE specialist directly assists building level school improvement specialists on-site weekly. Pine Bluff is implementing the Professional Learning Communities model and invested in PLC coaches who work with faculty to implement proven practices. At this time, the coordination of various supports has been pivotal in everyone working together for positive academic outcomes. The district is committed to a guaranteed and viable curriculum. All four elementary schools are in the process of implementing consistent professional learning and curriculum materials, as well as, the two middle schools, and the two high schools.

The priorities for Pine Bluff School District under the newly appointed Superintendent, Jennifer Barabree, are implementing a multi-tiered system of support for students, improving students reading on grade level, school safety, and building the capacity of the building administrators.

### **Student Support**

Pine Bluff School District is striving for ways to improve the safety and support for students within the district. There has been active involvement from the district with the Group Violence Intervention Program under the leadership of Lenita Hughes, where Superintendent Barbaree serves as an Executive Committee member. Superintendent Barbaree and her

assistant superintendents have also met with stakeholders within the district and community to determine gaps in the current system (school and community) that may be hindering students safety or preventing them from receiving the support they need. There have also been discussions with juvenile court on improving the Family In Need of Service (FINS) system.

The district has revisited the plan to implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and has completed walkthroughs for both elementary and secondary schools to determine areas of need for training since some schools are already implementing pieces of PBIS. There have also been several meetings held with student council members to gain feedback on the students' current needs or concerns.

Tragedy struck the district during this quarter with the loss of two high school students (Dollarway and Pine Bluff High). The district's response was swift and supportive of students and staff as they grieved and mourned the passing of the students. OCSS provided support for administration and support staff on the logistics for serving students based on need and identifying staff that may need support. The community was also supportive in providing support through volunteers from local mental health agencies, and support from school board members. An anonymous tip-line has been added to the website to report threats within the district. A flowchart for administrators is in development for ways to handle crises related to death and grief. There was also a district-wide crisis plan drafted for managing students and staff grief after the death of an individual associated with a campus. There was also on-site support provided by board members Mr. Whitmore and services offered and provided by Dr. Broughton's company when the district suffered the loss of the two students.

### **Human Capital**

An extensive audit of all teacher contracts, license, and certifications was completed to determine the true need of the district as it relates to human capital, facilities, and fiscal operations. The results of the audit revealed that there are currently 41% non-licensed teachers within the district PreK - 12. As a result of the audit, the district has decided to meet with non-licensed teachers and discuss non-renewal based on student course needs. The superintendent also met with all campus faculties stating the possibility of reassignment.

### **Academics**

The district leadership team has committed to walk-throughs with principals in all buildings to ensure best academic practices are being followed across the district. As a result of the walk-throughs there has been more cohesion amongst the administrators.

The district has partnered with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff to implement the AR Kids Read program at Southwood Elementary. The program is focused on improving student literacy while also providing real-life opportunities for college students in education programs

aspiring to be teachers.

All schools K-12 are currently implementing “What I Need” time to address individual needs of students to ensure that students who may require a little more support or for those that may need enrichment during designated times during the day. The WIN interventions have shown areas of student improvement, as well as, identified and placed an additional 32 students who demonstrated characteristics of dyslexia.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

Go Forward Pine Bluff and the Pine Bluff High School parent organization worked in collaboration with PBHS administration and coaches to celebrate the boys basketball team winning the State Championship with a block party where food and entertainment was provided.

During the monthly school board meetings, the superintendent provides detailed updates on all 6 systems (Academics, Human Capital, Student Support, Stakeholder Communication/Family & Community Engagement, District Operations & Fiscal Governance, and Facilities and Transportation) of district operations focused on student outcomes.

The superintendent participated in Pine Bluff ALumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Superintendent’s Forum and provided updates on the status of the district and answered questions posed by the members.

### **Facilities and Transportation**

The district has made the decision to merge high school and junior high students. Next school year, all tenth through twelfth grade students will attend the current Pine Bluff High School. Due to the cost of maintenance improvements including HVAC replacement, the decision was made to not house students at Jack Robey Junior High. Next school year, all seventh through ninth grade students will be housed in the newer Dollarway campuses. The district is conducting facility walks, analyzing course offerings, and verifying space availability to determine if Robert F. Morehead and/or Dollarway High School will be the junior high site for next school year.

The district will utilize ARP ESSER funds to replace and update all four elementary HVAC systems. The scope of work will begin after the last day of school. The district plans to purchase five new buses utilizing ARP ESSER.

The district applied for partnership funding in February of 2020 school year and was funded July 28, 2021. Due to covid, construction costs, change in administration, site location, etc. the district was granted an extension to utilize the partnership money. There is a tight timeline for the district to take advantage of the partnership money. The district was granted an extension, and is expected to be under contract by January 2024. The limited authority board has been publicly discussing the possibility of a millage campaign to build a new Pine Bluff High School. Currently the district is utilizing East Harding as the construction management

company, and they have interviewed three architect firms. The limited authority board is expected to select the architect April 5, 2023 at a special called board meeting.

### **Fiscal Governance and District Operations**

OCSS fiscal support meets weekly with the district finance office, asst. superintendent, and superintendent. OCSS provided District Federal Programs Director support regarding the reallocation of expenditures of identified expiring federal funds. All funds were expended by the appropriate deadline.

The new limited authority school board began their tenure in January. The Arkansas School Board Association provided a 6 hour introductory training on January 13, 2023. Every member attended a facilities, finance, and policy work session led by First Security, East Harding, and the superintendent on February 9, 2023. The limited authority school board has met regularly January - March. The superintendent and limited authority board president talk weekly and meet regularly to draft the meeting agenda. The board approved the academic calendar for the 2023-2024 school year.