



## DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

# Earle School District

## Legislative Quarterly Report

October - December 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner

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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.

## **EARLE BACKGROUND**

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. §6-20-1905, the Earle School District received notice by certified mail as being identified by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) for Fiscal Distress status. The District was classified in Fiscal Distress on October 12, 2017 due to the district failing to file an audit report within the nine month time period or within the time period under any extension granted by the Department of Education. The identification is based on acts or violations determined to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the district including, without limitation, failure to fully develop and implement adequate corrective actions for previously identified audit findings and deficiencies.

Because of significant findings that jeopardized the fiscal integrity of the district, the State Board of Education assumed authority of the district and appointed an interim superintendent on November 6, 2017. As a result of the issues, ADE Commissioner Johnny Key exercised the authority granted under Arkansas Code 6-20-1901 et seq. to assume authority over the board of directors; however, Commissioner Key offered the board the opportunity to remain in place in an advisory capacity to the new superintendent. ADE personnel determined the following Fiscal Distress Indicators during an internal audit:

- Title I 2015-16 unallowable expenditures \$300,299.97; 2016-17 unallowable expenditures \$303,436.85
- NSL 2015-16 potential unallowable expenditures \$555,128.63; 2016-17 potential unallowable expenditures \$717,429.86
- Athletic/Activity Concessions had gate receipts unaccounted for: one football game, one in concession, two for basketball game 17 in concession 20.
- Payroll had some contracts that could not be tied to a W2 and some W2s had no contract.
- District website was missing documents listing legal balances, budget, salary reports, monthly expenditures reports, student handbook, audits, policy signature page, ASCIP plan, statistical report, and board minutes were not up to date.
- Credit card showed unmonitored use/unaccounted for documentation; potential cash advance to cover payroll.

On May 9, 2019, the State Board of Education approved a request from the Earle School district leadership and community advisory board to classify the district in need of Level 5 support.

### **Current DESE Quarterly Support**

#### **Submitted: John Hoy, Assistant State Superintendent**

The Office of Coordinated Support and Service (OCSS) team in coordination with the Division of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) has continued to provide support to the Earle

School District. John Hoy, Assistant State Superintendent, is onsite supporting the district 3-4 days a week. Ryan Burgess and Terri McCann, both Leadership Development Coaches, support the principals in the district. Julie Amstutz, State Special Education Leadership Development Coach, provides support for district staff in their efforts to improve instruction, support teacher growth, and increase student achievement for students with disabilities. Dr. Michael Watson, behavior leadership coach, provides support for district staff in their efforts to build a safe, collaborative culture for all students. Carol Herringer, Educational Ombudsmen and DESE Literacy Specialist assists instructional literacy educators. Kelly Stone, DESE RISE (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence) regional specialist, assists in ensuring implementation of the science of reading.

Emphasis this quarter has been on continuing to support local staff in a manner that allows for maximum local capacity in all fiscal matters. Academic emphasis has been on positively impacting classroom instruction. The OCSS team has worked with Earle School District administrators, the DESE Fiscal Services and Support unit, educational consultants from Solution Tree, and support specialists from Crowley's Ridge Educational Service Cooperative (CRESC) staff to provide support in all district systems.

### **Student Support**

The district has continued to implement scheduling structures that allow time for student remediation and/or enrichment during the school day that is outside of regular class time on both campuses. Teachers and instructional support staff continue to meet at least weekly at both schools to collaboratively discuss essential standards and student progress toward mastery of those standards. This work is supported by Solution Tree and DESE staff.

The district is continuing to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in its ongoing effort to build and maintain a positive culture for all students. Earle's PBIS Tier I support strategies are now in place and Tier II and Tier III support strategies for behavior are being developed. Data collected by the OCSS team and district administration over the prior year indicated that as PBIS points awarded to students increased, disciplinary referrals decreased.

The district provides dyslexia support for those students identified. Currently 34 students receive dyslexia intervention services from a trained dyslexia interventionist. Initial screening is complete and students are being monitored for progress. CRESC provides support for the district in this area.

### **Human Capital**

Earle School District has continued to refine recruitment and onboarding strategies to staff district needs. Data noted in the [DESE LEA Insights database](#) reflects this effort by showing that the number of courses taught by teachers with a licensure exception in the district has declined three years in a row (from 177 courses in 2019 to 77 courses in 2022). The district

success is a combined effort of district staff and the ongoing support of DESE staff. Currently the district is in need of two teachers at the elementary campus. To ensure children are being served, OCSS staff are filling in to address student needs in those classes when it is deemed appropriate by district staff. The ability to maintain a quality staff is the area of most concern for the long-term viability of the district.

Transportation is also a shortage area and the district is still attempting to secure additional bus drivers.

### **Academic**

NWEA Assessments for the initial interim are complete and the results for Earle Elementary seem to indicate progress in cohorts of students in grades four through six. Grade to grade level comparisons appear to be less promising. This is the first full year of implementing the adopted literacy curriculum. Earle High School also adopted new curricular material last year and is in the first full year of implementation. Thus far results look promising for the high school as the interim assessments seem to show an increased percentage of students reaching grade level in both literacy and math. Both schools are participating in professional development activities to increase their familiarity with the adopted materials.

In addition to the adoption of new curricula, the support teams from DESE and CRESC have conducted monthly districtwide focus walks and noted a significant improvement in instruction at both schools. There is still work to be done to ensure a guaranteed viable curriculum for all students across all grade levels, but both schools are continuing to participate in the PLC process toward this end.

As a footnote on academics in the district, the Earle staff, students, parents, and support personnel were happy to celebrate Earle High School receiving State recognition for being among the top 10% for growth on assessments and graduation rates in 2021.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

During this quarter the district has continued to implement its approved Family and Community Engagement plan with minimal support from DESE staff.

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

The DESE Fiscal Support and Services Unit in coordination with OCSS provides ongoing support to the district through onsite visits and remote assistance in all fiscal matters. The ESD fiscal staff continues to participate in training with the intent to become self-sustaining. The legislative audit for FY 22 is now complete and there are no findings.

### **Facilities and Transportation**

The HVAC project designed to improve air quality in the district is nearing completion. The work at the high school is now complete. Systems are now being addressed at the elementary school cafeteria. Additionally an updated camera system has been approved and installed at the high school

The district sold three district facilities that were no longer of use to the district. The total net proceeds for the district was \$40,483.50 and will be used to address district debt.