



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Pine Bluff School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

July - September 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

October 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.

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

Submitted: Jennifer Barbaree, Assistant State Superintendent

The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Coordinated Support and Service provides direct support to Pine Bluff School District. Assistant State Superintendent, Jennifer Barbaree and Leadership Development Coach, Ryan Burgess are on site 3-4 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 2-3 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 has implemented 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 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

Summer school was hosted at two of the elementary schools and one of the middle schools. The average elementary daily attendance was 150 students. The average daily attendance of junior high students was 100. Pine Bluff High provided credit recovery for over 200 students during two summer sessions. Dyslexia interventionists offered continued support for students with characteristics of dyslexia and provided interventions to students who chose to continue throughout the summer.

The district virtual coordinator conducted a thorough review of students who attended virtual academy last school year. During the review specific issues were identified. The review provided insight to create a strong admission process for PBSVD virtual school. The virtual coordinator met with parents, students, and educators to share the admission process which included specific criteria. Students who attend virtual school must have good attendance, passing grades, and weekly check ins. Currently, there are 41 seventh through twelfth grade virtual students and 32 kindergarten through sixth grade.

In efforts to meet all student needs, student intervention teams (SIT) have been established at all campuses. The new assistant superintendents were provided a quick overview of SmartData. district administration set expectations that each SIT team will consistently meet, review data, and provide student interventions.

In the area of special education, the district focus going forward is to reduce the number of day school referrals, increase inclusive practices, and provide additional support to the district in efforts to benefit the students historically attending day school. Specific additional supports include "Read and Write", which is specific assistive technology for students and sound systems.

The district met with Strategos International representatives to review the safety audit.

Corrective actions were already established and shared with the Strategos team. Strategos provided district-wide and building specific safety training in September. The district continues to make safety improvements. Current improvements include hiring a Director of Safety and Security who is attending SRO trainings each month, the hiring of five additional security personnel, and visitor entrance systems are in place at each campus.

Human Capital

Roles and responsibilities have been established for the new assistant superintendents. They are working diligently to hire needed personnel. In efforts to have optimal staffing for student enrollment, some teachers are shared across buildings. There were a few teacher transfers to support student numbers, and due to the change in the building grade level configurations, some teachers were transferred to different buildings. The district has replaced several teaching positions, and all have been filled. Including the PreK Center, there are 259 classroom teachers. Of these 259 classroom teachers, 112 are on a pathway to obtain licensure.

The district is still seeking to fill classified personnel including administrative assistant, custodial, maintenance, and bus driver positions.

Due to resignations, the district business office has had many adjustments since July. A new business manager has been hired and is currently working closely with DESE and OCSS fiscal support to ensure the district finances are in order.

Academics

School got off to a very smooth start. All secondary schools opened without any incidents. The opening at Pine Bluff High School was especially impressive. It is evident that the actions the district has taken to improve the campus in the area of safety and security are yielding the desired results and both students and staff are adapting. All schools have adjusted well to the grade level reconfigurations for elementary, middle school, and high school (K-6 from K-5, 7-9 from 6-8, & 10-12 from 9-12, respectively). All secondary schools alternated from an eight period day to an A/B block schedule. Students attend four periods a day. Instructional block professional learning was provided to teachers in efforts to support the A/B block change. Teacher support in this area will be ongoing. The two high schools were planning to partner with SEARK to provide on campus college courses for high school students. The program will not begin this semester due to a lack of qualifying students. The level of desire remains high to initiate this program but more work has to be done to make it actionable.

Solution Tree coaches along with 95% Group Curriculum coaches have been on-site providing curriculum and instruction support. The DESE RISE Literacy specialist is working closely with the district curriculum coordinator and the district dyslexia specialist to ensure all

beginning of year assessments have been completed. The expectation has been set that each campus will incorporate a daily “What I Need” (WIN) time. Students will be provided specific support and interventions based on the results of the beginning of the year assessments. Most of the assessments have been completed. New teachers are currently participating in K-2 and 3-6 RISE cohorts at Arkansas River ESC.

The district has created a district level focus walk tool and has scheduled focus walk rotations starting October 1.

There is a need for additional curriculum resources. The district has ordered new science and social studies texts along with additional literacy curriculum resources. Not all of these items are available to teachers at this time.

Family and Community Engagement

The district continues to work through the strategic planning process in collaboration with WestEd. Individual meetings with community partners have taken place. The community advisory committee has established the strategic planning strategies that will be shared with the community at the annual report to the public in October. The community kick-off has been rescheduled to a community event at the report to the public.

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 preparation for the 2022-2023 school year, The DESE Fiscal Support and Services Unit in coordination with OCSS met with the district staff to provide proactive support in the budgeting process. Items addressed included, but not limited to: historical balance trends in operating and building funds, enrollment, staffing, millage, tax collections, debt payments, revenue sources, revenue amounts, future enrollment projections district wide and by cohort, certified and classified staffing by position trends for the last 12 years, audit results, expenditure requirements, fund balance carryover amounts, detailed budgeting projections, and analysis for revenue and expenditure line items.

Additional onsite meetings have occurred in assisting the district with the debt request process as well as bookkeeping and overall financial processes and procedures. The district has created a plan to address internal controls, processes, procedures, and policies. The district has continued to struggle meeting cycle report deadlines with intensive supports. This continues to be an area of concern and directed support required.