



## DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

# **Legislative Update for Lee County School District**

State Authority

July - September 2021

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

October 15, 2021

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 the new process 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 major focus of this report will be around the Academic System and District Operations and Fiscal Governance System.

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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 Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## **Current DESE Quarterly Support of Level 5 Support**

### **July - September 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 3-4 days per week providing support to leadership and coordinating various services. Lee County has embraced 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 elementary school continues to improve in their delivery of literacy instruction, utilizing a high quality curriculum. Dallas Henderson, ADE RISE specialist and literacy coaches from the Great Rivers Cooperative have been partners in supporting literacy educators and instructional support staff. Student engagement at the high school level continues to be a priority, and the new administration has set instructional expectations.

### **Student Support**

The district and school administration actively reached out to families to locate students who did not return to school in August. They were successful in bringing back a large number of students who had not engaged. The current enrollment for the district is 619 which is the same as the three quarter average during 20-21 SY. Eight (8) students have not been located districtwide. Thirty (30) students enrolled last year have not re-engaged, however both schools have outreach plans. These plans include school administrators, support staff and teachers attempting to locate students who have not returned to on-site instruction or who are not consistently attending school.

The district continues to implement recommendations to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by supporting a layered approach of masking, distancing, cleaning and sanitizing. As a result of the diligent efforts to mitigate the spread of the Covid virus, the district has experienced minor disruptions due to positive cases within the schools

at this time.

The district has added positions at both schools to assist with the implementation of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The goal for this year is for the schools to fully-embrace and embed the components of MTSS into their organizational structure so systems-level and stakeholder-level innovations can be initiated, implemented with fidelity, and maintained successfully over time.

### **Human Capital**

Despite efforts on the part of the district and school leadership, the high school was unable to fill two math positions and one foreign language position. The district has contracted with Proximity Learning, a national company that provides certified teachers that will be providing live streamed instruction and Tier 2 skills-based math intervention. Until Proximity teachers begin on October 11, there has been a collaborative effort between the DESE, Great Rivers Education Cooperative (GRESOC) staff, and Office of Coordinated Support and Service (OCSS) to provide virtual and face-to-face lessons in Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry utilizing the units developed by the Solution Tree Math Coach.

The district continues to struggle with recruiting and retaining certified teachers, but has plans for ensuring staff receive continuous support in the form of professional development, coaching, modeling and resources. There will be a laser-like focus on teaching and learning this school year, capitalizing on the strengths of support staff as well as eliciting support from various organizations. As instructors improve their craft, it is essential for sustained improvement that the schools keep quality teachers in the classroom; to that end, the district is beginning the design year of Opportunity Culture. In addition, long range plans include the implementation of Educator Rising at the high school in an effort to grow their own teachers resulting in scholars returning to Lee County with a vested interest in developing leaders inside and outside the classrooms.

### **Academics**

The elementary and the high school both have made significant strides in the area of student engagement and classroom instruction. The principals at both campuses are instructmental in setting a positive school climate with an emphasis on teaching. Ms. Murdock visits school campuses daily. Curricula aligned to the science of reading have been purchased and are being implemented. The district is making ongoing strides to ensure implementation is following intended instructional practices aligned with the science of reading by providing ongoing support through modeling and feedback. Dyslexia interventionists and instructional facilitators are trained in the Barton Reading and Spelling System and are providing services to students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia. Level 1 screeners have been administered to

all K-12 students and data are currently being analyzed.

Both campuses have intervention time embedded in the master schedules. Next steps include finalizing assessing all students to identify skills gaps and to provide access to an intervention program that will be adaptive and personalized based on data.

Data collected from a review of transcripts in grades 10-12 will be used to identify students that have completed, or enrolled in, classes needed to graduate on time. Likewise, students requiring credit recovery will be counseled and a plan developed.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

COVID informational meetings have been hosted by district leadership to provide stakeholders with current data, information about the vaccine as well as fielding questions regarding safety protocols that are in place at both schools. The community has supported the district's decision for a layer approach of masking, physical distancing, and sanitation.

### **Facilities and Transportation**

HVAC upgrades to improve air quality are part of the district's ESSER Plan that was submitted on September 1.

### **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 <sup>th</sup> of each year
The district will budget all Foundation Funds in fund 2000.	September 30 <sup>th</sup> of each year
The amount of Foundation Funding budgeted for salaries will not exceed 85% of the current year foundation fund revenue.	September 30 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> 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 annual budget.

Action	Completion Date
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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 <sup>th</sup> 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