



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Lee County School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

April - June 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

July 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

Submitted: Sheila Whitlow, Assistant State Superintendent

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 were on site approximately 4 days per week during the fourth quarter 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 Solution Tree coaches. At this time, the coordination of various supports has been pivotal in everyone working together for positive outcomes. Finishing strong was a theme at both schools with a focus on targeted interventions in reading.

Student Support

This year the district renewed efforts to implement an effective Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) at both schools. Although the district had a PBIS Coordinator in each building and provided professional learning experiences for designated personnel, consistent implementation was not observed. Several factors created challenges for full implementation; however, based on a desire to provide all students with social, emotional and/or academic support and to create a safer, more supportive culture in the schools, the district recruited and hired behavior support specialists for the upcoming school year as well as an assistant principal that will lead newly formed PLC collaborative Rtl teams. These teams will meet regularly to review data, identify students that require Tier II and Tier III interventions. The additional personnel and creation of collaborative Rtl teams will result in a positive culture, one that will focus on providing student-by-student and skill-by-skill support. The OCSS State Behavior Coach and Solution Tree Coaches will work closely with the Rtl collaborative teams to ensure the plan is followed with integrity and targeted students are provided the interventions needed.

Human Capital

When the district fills two remaining vacancies, they will be able to celebrate a full staff prior to the July 25 start date. Historically, it has been a challenge to have a full staff before the beginning of the school year; considering the early start, it was imperative that this was accomplished quickly this year. There was a concerted effort to recruit teachers within the state as well as internationally resulting in hiring a total of twenty-five (25) certified teachers and support staff: 22 licensed and 3 hired under the Act 1240 Waiver. A majority of the staff contracts were disseminated prior to the end of the school year which was an improvement over previous years. Additional instructional support staff have been added at both schools and a consultant has been hired to recruit certified teachers, mentor novice teachers, monitor the progress of all teachers on an alternate pathway to licensure and ensure teachers not yet

on a pathway will be aware of all options for becoming a certified teacher. In addition, a team from Educator Effectiveness will assist with the licensure effort. The creation of a highly effective instructional support team demonstrates the district's conviction that there is a direct correlation between retention of teachers and an ongoing support structure. To ensure this team has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities including day-to-day schedule expectations, the district's Solution Tree coach provided professional learning with respect to effective coaching techniques, leading PLC collaborative team meetings and importance of professionalism as leaders in their respective schools. The district's administration and OCSS will continue support for the instructional staff throughout the upcoming school year.

Academics

The PLC journey for the district is continuing with progress evident through the observation of data-based decisions regarding specific student needs and interventions planned to target said needs; improved collaborative team meeting agendas with conversations centered around student data; and unit and learning cycle planning. To close the achievement gap that was exacerbated by the pandemic, teachers met in vertical teams to review the year's progress and identify essential standards that will require additional instruction as students transition up. This is an effort to ensure prerequisite skills are learned while continuing grade level instruction. The acceleration approach is a stark contrast to the common catch-up strategy of working backwards to teach students what they missed. Each school's instructional support staff will play an integral part in the success of the implementation of the acceleration rather than remediation process. Although Spring interim assessments revealed student growth, the growth was not consistent across grade levels and was not at the rate needed to overcome the learning gaps that exist. With that being said, schools celebrated the growth and then promptly began planning for the upcoming school year knowing there is still much work to be done. It is promising to note that all teachers in grades K-12 will have essential standards identified and cycles of learning developed as we start the 2022-2023 school year. Continued support must focus on the integrity of the learning cycles so teachers consistently focus on teaching the prerequisite skills that will lead to the greatest levels of learning and achievement for all students.

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 district finance department in collaboration with APSRC and OCSS met to identify and develop standard operating procedures in an effort to streamline financial transactions, ensure internal controls and promote proactive responses to deadlines. The district's Financial Policies and Procedures Manual was updated during the work sessions as well. A gradual release of responsibility from APSRC to district staff is planned for the upcoming fiscal year; this will require close monitoring since the district finance department continues to

require considerable technical support. Meeting deadlines and timely attention to fiscal matters continues to be a challenge even with standard operating procedures in place. Said procedures are only as strong as those charged with following them; therefore, it is imperative that the newly created standard operating procedures are implemented and all individuals are held accountable for following procedures.

Summer 2022 Priorities:

- Provide targeted interventions during summer school.
- Develop and implement a Transition Plan for the change in superintendents.
- All instructional and behavioral support staff understand the job description of their role, expectations of daily schedules and data that should be collected and shared during CTMs.
- Instructional materials inventoried and needed materials ordered by June 16 so they will be in the teacher's hands when they are back on campus July 18.
- Complete and/or update unit plans and develop learning cycles during the district's school improvement conference with support from Solution Tree coaches, OCSS, building principals and instructional support staff.
- Create a three year revenue and expenditure trend report after the close of FY22 to assist with development of the FY23 budget.
- Conduct facilities maintenance and safety walk prior to the first day of school. Prioritize work orders to create a safe learning environment.