



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Earle 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.

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 have 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 Julie Almutz, both Leadership Development Coaches, support the principals in the district. 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.

Emphasis this quarter has been on continuing to implement, assess, and revise school improvement plans, the district plan of support, and the fiscal distress plans. The OCSS team has worked with the DESE Fiscal Services and Support unit, and Crowley's Ridge Educational Service Cooperative (CRESC) staff to provide support in implementing these plans.

Student Support

The district has solidified a structure that allows time for student remediation and/or enrichment during the school day outside of regular class time. Teachers and instructional support staff meet at least weekly at the high school and several times throughout the week to collaboratively discuss essential standards and student progress toward mastery of those standards. This work is continuing to be supported by Solution Tree and CRESC staff. While time for this work is now in place, the process for ensuring mastery for all students is still being refined.

In addition to providing regular student intervention time, the district continues to provide dyslexia interventions and provides critical and strategic reading courses at the high school.

The implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been an ongoing effort to build and maintain a positive culture for all students. Earle's PBIS Tier I implementation is now at a point where students are aware of their expectations and know that they will receive reinforcement for desired behavior. Data collected over the year indicates that as PBIS points awarded to students have increased while the number of disciplinary referrals has decreased. Specifically there were 798 disciplinary referrals in quarter two, 319 in quarter three and 309 in quarter four. Tier II and Tier III support strategies for behavior are still being developed.

Human Capital

During the fourth quarter the District enhanced their recruitment strategies by clarifying the onboarding process for contracting new teachers. Additionally, the district has increased both the certified and non-certified salary schedules to meet or exceed the state minimums and provided multiple allowable financial incentives based on fund source. These efforts have resulted in the district being able to recruit certain staff and reduce the dependency on virtual options for the upcoming school year.

Efforts now are shifting to enhancing retention efforts. Preliminary numbers indicate that as many as 31% of certified staff will leave the district this year. District administrators did conduct exit interviews with staff that resigned. Noted reasons for leaving include retirement, moving out of the state, accepting promotions, transitioning to districts in which they live, or receiving significant salary increases.

While efforts to retain staff is important, it is also important to note that not all staff leaving the district have to be replaced. District administrators understand that as student populations trend downward, they must consider staff reductions to ensure fiscal integrity.

Academic

This semester a priority has been placed on ensuring that all students are exposed to grade level standards in every class. Members of the OCSS team have paired with district administrators and have continued to visit classrooms during this quarter. Observations by both district and OCSS staff produced a general agreement that instruction has improved districtwide but still remains a concern.

Updated curriculum resources in literacy, math, and social sciences were acquired during FY 22. While this was a positive step for the district, it was also challenging for staff to pivot to new materials midstream. ESD is in the process of preparing for the full implementation of these new resources in FY23.

NWEA assessment results for grades K-2 are complete and preliminary results indicate that 34% of students met or exceeded growth projections in math between the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022 representing a 10% growth from the same time span during the prior year. Additionally, the percent meeting or exceeding projections in reading rose from 25.5% to 33.7%. While this growth is less than desired, the district has implemented an extended learning experience this summer to further address the learning loss brought on by the pandemic. High school assessment results are still pending but the high school is also providing extended learning opportunities this summer.

An ongoing concern that directly impacts student achievement is student attendance. It has been noted that the district's overall attendance rate has trended below 95%. Efforts put in place over the course of the year seem to have had some impact. Preliminary numbers indicate that this year's final attendance rate will be 94.23% up slightly from the 92.42% attendance rate for FY 21. While there are still concerns that the 95% target has not been met, and several students have been identified as chronically absent, the current positive trend is encouraging.

Family and Community Engagement

During the fourth quarter the district has continued to implement its Family and Community Engagement plan with minimal support requested from DESE staff. During this quarter the district has held three evening activities for parents and the community.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

The DESE Fiscal Support Unit continues to provide support to the district weekly through virtual meetings and onsite meetings (as requested) with the district's superintendent and finance staff. Access to additional training on fiscal matters has been provided to the district through the OCSS office. These support efforts are manifesting themselves in a staff that is becoming increasingly knowledgeable and efficient. Evidence to support this statement can be gleaned from the fact that all actions in the FY22 fiscal distress plan that were expected to be completed thus far have been.

In regard to other operations and governance matters, the district continues to refine and develop policies and procedures designed to ensure a systemic approach to help eliminate the pitfalls that lead to State intervention. Specifically, the district is regularly revisiting its written plan for internal control processes. The district has also cleared all findings in the online standards monitoring system. Low kindergarten enrollment numbers are a concern and maintaining student enrollment numbers will be crucial to the district's determination of viability.

Facilities and Transportation

Performance Services has begun work on phase 1 of the HVAC project designed to improve air quality with the use of ESSER funding. Exterior doors have been replaced at the high school and HVAC system work has begun with completion expected prior to students arriving in the fall.