



## DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

# **Pine Bluff School District**

## **Legislative Quarterly Report**

January - March 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

April 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**

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. Alicia Whiteside, DESE Literacy specialist also directly assists literacy coaches in the district. 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**

Implementing a multi-tiered system of support has been the focus during this quarter. The district worked collaboratively with Dr. Michael Watson, OCSS, to create building level Student Intervention Teams (SIT). Each team includes an administrator, social worker, nurse, teacher, and counselor. Dr. Watson coordinated initial SIT meetings with each building principal. Due to various circumstances, four of the nine campuses have not conducted the team's initial meeting. All teams have been trained utilizing the SmartData student information website.

Through the use of data and teacher surveys, each building principal has created a building behavior intervention plan for students. Principals have met with teachers and students to set expectations and how to utilize the plan.

Continued efforts are being made to ensure safety of students and faculty at Pine Bluff High School. The monitoring and adjustment to the safety plan is a primary focus of the administration to maintain the safety of the campus. Positive results of the school safety plan indicate less student altercations, less tardies, and overall order. The school climate at the high school has improved. However, the school has lost at least 4 students this school year due to gun violence. These occurrences did not happen at the school, but within the community. However, the students and educators are grieving. Additional counseling services and support have been brought into the school. The students participated in a student walkout recently to voice concern about the student deaths and concerns related to the discussion of moving students from the current campus due to safety concerns.

This quarter an additional commissioned security officer has been employed exclusively at Pine Bluff High School. This addition affords two commissioned officers for Pine Bluff School District. One of the commissioned security officers is actively recruiting student candidates for the district's mentoring program at all secondary campuses. Next quarter these student mentors will begin specific training to aid in safety and support of students at the secondary campuses and work alongside officers and mentors through the G.R.I.P (Gang Reduction Initiative in Pine Bluff) program. Building administration is conducting daily classroom focus walks seeking academic engagement and for visibility.

## **Human Capital**

The Pine Bluff business office has experienced restructuring due to a leave of absence of an Assistant Superintendent position. The district has employed Dr. Bryant to assist this semester since the two Assistant Superintendent positions are unfilled. The district is seeking applications at this time. The restructuring has provided collaboration among district personnel to ensure financial needs are being met. The district general business manager has created a visual monthly financial report process in efforts to streamline the business office process and communicate roles. The general business manager meets weekly with DESE finance support.

Personnel and staffing remains an area of concern in the Pine Bluff School district, as well as many other districts in the state. The district had seven certified teacher resignations and or retirements within this quarter. The district's retention and recruitment director is continuing to collaborate with local colleges and the community to recruit quality staff.

## **Academics**

Administration is conducting daily classroom focus walks seeking academic engagement. The district has provided a literacy curriculum resources that are aligned to the science of reading for all campuses. Jennifer Barbaree, OCSS, has met with all building principals and created individual plans to support administration in the implementation of the science of reading. Continued professional development and academic coaching is scheduled and being provided. Science of reading focus walk data indicates a need for further support for implementing the new curriculum resources. A DESE RISE specialist has met with each elementary school improvement specialist to determine individual building support needs. There is ongoing literacy classroom support at all levels.

The district curriculum and instruction director conducted individual meetings with building administration and school improvement specialists to review and provide feedback for the building level school improvement plans. Student data, teacher needs, and professional development support are the focus of each plan. The building level school improvement teams are revising and developing the school improvement plans to be submitted to the superintendent May 1st.

## **Family and Community Engagement**

Pine Bluff School District has established a community advisory committee that meets every month. During this quarter the community advisory committee shared a district survey with the community. There were over 500 community responses. The advisory committee is currently undergoing the development of a strategic plan based on the survey data. The goal is to utilize the community input to develop and share the district's future strategic plan, mission, vision, and goals.

The district superintendent presented school board zoning options through the local

newspaper and district website. There will be a community meeting to provide further information and input from the community in efforts to present a collaborative decision for the new school board zones.

The district has been approved for partnership money to build a new high school. The superintendent presented future high school building plan options during the annual report to the public and provided opportunity for community feedback and discussion. After the report to the public, the superintendent held an additional meeting in efforts to explain the creation and purpose of the district's facilities committee and has invited community members to sign up to be on the committee. Some community members have adamantly disagreed with a suggested proposal of building the new high school in a different location. Misinformation has definitely hindered the efforts and caused frustration. The district is working through a communication plan to assist in providing accurate information. The decision to build a new high school has not been finalized and will require an extension of a millage. Site location has not been determined. Concerns related to the existing campus and safety are at the forefront of discussions.

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

Since there were fiscal employment changes during this quarter, time has been spent setting expectations of roles and responsibilities in the fiscal department. The interim general business manager consistently meets with DESE fiscal support. The general business manager has shared expectations of roles, created a monthly protocol checklist, and is working to ensure there is a streamlined process for all fiscal business. During this quarter the fiscal focus has been to correct errors from previous months and establish system protocols. Financial support will be an on-going need until the district is able to define roles and establish a system.

### **Fiscal Distress Plan**

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1905, on August 31, 2017, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) identified the Pine Bluff School District as a school district in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education made this identification because the Pine Bluff School District had a declining balance identified by ADE to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the school district.

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 Pine Bluff School District will enact the following fiscal distress improvement plan aimed at correcting all criteria for being classified as in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education will continue to provide technical assistance to the school district.

Objective 1: Develop and maintain a district budget aligned to annual funding amounts.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
The district will create a district budget that aligns to the revenue on the State Aid Notice.	September 30 <sup>th</sup> of each year
The district will budget all Foundation Funding in fund 2000.	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
In collaboration with DESE, the district will identify staff positions and sections that are paid with operating funds that are not required to meet the Standards for Accreditation.	December 15, 2021
In collaboration with DESE, the district will develop a staffing plan that meets the Standards for Accreditation and utilizes a maximum of 85% of foundation funding for the next school year.	February 15, 2022

Objective 2: Create a facilities and transportation maintenance plan that promotes efficiency and aligns with the annual budget.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
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

Objective 3: Comply with required financial reporting.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
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 the DESE Fiscal Services Office.	15 <sup>th</sup> of each Month
The district will submit all required reports/budgets to the proper agencies.	As Required by Deadlines

Objective 4: Implement best financial practices.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
In collaboration with DESE, the district will create and implement a written plan for internal controls processes.	March 2022
The district will conduct and document a physical inventory check annually.	Annually by September 30 <sup>th</sup>
The superintendent or assistant superintendent will open and document monthly review of the bank statement.	Monthly
The superintendent will print and document a review of a district Board Report from eFinance weekly for all funds.	Every Monday