



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Helena-West Helena School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

January - March 2023

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner

April 2023

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.

Current DESE Quarterly Support

Submitted: Sheila Whitlow, Assistant State Superintendent

Overview

During the third quarter of the 2022-23 school year, the support has been focused on providing targeted skills-based interventions, ensuring grade level standards based core instruction is provided to all students and maximizing use of daily instructional minutes. Much work is needed to achieve these goals, but the district leadership has communicated to each building leader that the aforementioned are “tights” from the district. Buildings are being supported in this work through a collaborative effort between the Office of Coordinated Support and Service (OCSS), Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative (GRESO), DESE RISE Specialists, NIET coach, Solution Tree coach and building lead teachers.

Academics

During previous school years both schools have made an attempt to operate as Professional Learning Communities, but it is evident through observations and artifacts that more work is needed in this area. To that end, OCSS arranged for a site visit including Helena West Helena principals and district leaders to Lee County School District to observe collaborative team meetings at both the elementary and high school as well as time to meet with the principals to discuss each school’s transformation from “PLC Lite to PLC Right”. Lee County leaders shared the challenges they faced, how they have worked to overcome the challenges and the continued growth needed in the areas of data based decision making, effective and efficient team meetings and strong core instruction. HWHS leaders left with a better understanding of what it takes to become a Professional Learning Community and their role in the process. Supt. McGee and the District School Improvement Specialist (DSIS) followed up with meetings with each principal to identify next steps in the process. The district has contracted with external organizations to ensure each building has the support needed to begin the process of identifying essential standards, analyzing the standards to identify what students are expected to know and be able to do and planning units of study in each grade level and content area. Coaching and professional learning opportunities will be provided to assist teachers with lesson development and delivery that follow the district’s gradual release instructional model and implementation of high quality instructional material. Support for this has come from GRESO, DESE specialists, contracted services and OCSS. The district monitors the progress through Focus Walks and weekly meetings with the building leadership as well as the bi-weekly District Academic Leadership Meetings.

DESE RISE Specialists Sandy Shepard and Andress Scott as well as the OCSS Team members have worked closely with the JF Wahl and district team to identify assessments that should be administered and how the data from these assessments will be used to group students for Tier II instruction. Currently, there is a lack of evidence of planning for targeted interventions and effective professional development during the weekly two-hour after school meetings. Leadership does not consistently follow up with tasks and emails from the R.I.S.E. specialist. On site support is often provided by the OCSS team to ensure data and information is provided to assist with planning. Although there is support provided by a variety of external organizations, Dr. McGee recognizes the need for an effective instructional support team at the district and school levels; to that end he has worked with OCSS to develop a plan for the 2023-24 school year. The plan has been shared with Deputy Commissioner Stacy Smith, the HWHS School Board as well as other stakeholder groups in

the district continuing his goal to communicate clearly the what and the why of the work that is being done to move the district forward resulting in high levels of learning for all students.

DCTE Director Ross White met with district and school staff to review Central High School's current CTE Program and to discuss possible expansion including partnerships with other agencies. Mr. White discussed the current pathways and partnering with PCCUA to ensure students are graduating with credentials or certifications and on career pathways. He emphasized the need for counselors to enroll students in the correct sequence of pathways rather than just placing them in classes which has frequently occurred. He shared information about the Program Start Up Grants and encouraged the principal to contact CTE Specialist at GRESC about the Off Cycle Grant Applications (Jan. 1 - May 30). Additionally, the team learned that ESSER or ESA funds can be used to update equipment or purchase new equipment. There was a discussion about the possibility of partnering with Doughboy, a local manufacturer, for a Construction Technology pathway. Two site visits suggested by Mr. White were to Pea Ridge who has a School-Based Health Center and Lonoke Business Academy. When considering starting new programs the school must take into account student interest, staff availability and the workforce stability.

OCSS, DESE and GRESC have collaborated with district leadership and representatives from both schools to develop and implement a plan for preparing students for the ACT Aspire Summative Assessment. Implementation of the plans will be monitored during the district team's weekly Focus Walks. The majority of the teachers have been receptive to the assistance. To ensure the weeks following testing are meaningful, collaborative team meetings will be conducted to identify the step up standards for the final quarter of the school year; these standards are defined as the most essential to ensure students are prepared for the next grade level or related subject area. Formative assessment data will be used to determine which of the essentials students need additional support and which could include extensions.

Student Support

The district's Special Education Department continues to be a concern and has required extensive and almost daily support from OCSS and DESE OSE Team. Julie Amstutz, OCSS, has provided direct support to the current LEA Supervisor and professional development for Special Education teachers. During site visits the focus has been to finalize the Focused Monitoring requirement of student level corrections, provide an update of the Focused Monitoring finding of overdue evaluations and provide a calendar with dates of all students' Annual Review dates emphasizing the importance of holding the conferences during the appropriate time frame. She has regularly reported to district leadership the work being done as well as areas of concern. Realizing the need for additional support, Superintendent McGee has hired an external provider to assist weekly with required paperwork, review of student folders, planning for the 2023-24 school year and preparing for the Office of Special Education's On-site Cycle Monitoring that will be conducted next school year. The district leadership and the OCSS Team are optimistic about the plans for next school year which include the addition of an Executive Director of Student Services; this position will be responsible for all student support services and will supervise and support the staff assigned to the Special Education Department. OCSS will work closely with the Executive Director to ensure a smooth transition and ensure the Special Education Department of Helena West Helena School District not only complies with all federal and state regulations, but is also serving students through effective instructional practices and is ensuring high quality learning experiences for all students.

Based on information provided during Listen and Learn Stakeholder Meetings, individual meetings with parents and other community members, conversations with board members, meetings with the

city's first responders, meetings with students and teachers and through frequent site visits at both campuses, Superintendent McGee developed a security plan for the district. Said plan includes the development of the district's own police department led by the newly hired Commissioned Security Officer who will serve as the police chief. This has been approved and the district is currently interviewing for security personnel. In addition to adding security officers on each campus and during extracurricular activities, he is also planning to add locked entryway foyers at the elementary school to ensure visitors are unable to walk through the main entrance without first checking in at the office. Security Walks have been conducted to identify any vulnerable areas, any procedures or practices that could be improved to increase the level of security at each school and to monitor expectations such as all classroom doors locked, all visitors sign in and wear visitor badges, etc. Working with various stakeholders, Chief Strickland is developing a Districtwide Crisis Response Plan that will be ready for the 2023-24 school year.

Other student support plans include: working with Bright Futures and Every Arkansan to meet need the unique needs of families in the community; applying for a health center that could be housed in a section of the old high school; on-site mental health agencies providing offices for these agencies on each campus; using ARP ESSER funds to build a wellness area for the elementary students who currently do not have a playground or outdoor classrooms; and develop a multi-tier system of support for both schools. All of the aforementioned plans will be under the direction of the Executive Director of Student Services.

F.A.C.E.

Public School Program Advisor Janet Hickman worked with the district to host a meeting with the city pastoral alliance and Dr. CJ Huff from Bright Futures. Continued work will be done to build this alliance to assist with meeting needs of families and communities in the district. A point of contact from the district has been named to ensure this work begins and its efforts are coordinated to ensure sustainability.

Dr. McGee hosted a community meeting, Cookies and Conversations, during which he provided information to a standing-room only crowd regarding the security plan, current student data and how the district is responding to promote high levels of learning for all students, how the district will become more student focused, and how parents/community members can support the work of the district which in turn will strengthen the city and will restore pride in the district and in the community.

Human Capital

OCSS has worked closely with the district leadership to conduct a staffing analysis: identify FTEs that may be needed for the upcoming school year using ADM projections for the upcoming year; placement of staff based on license area, degrees and certifications; alternative licensure pathway progress; salary schedule additions and revisions. A closer look at the licensure area, degrees and individual competencies of each teacher has been conducted to make certain each grade or subject assignment best suits the individual; in other words, are the teachers teaching the right subjects. Several inconsistencies were noted and reassignments will be made for the upcoming school year. Additionally, job descriptions, application screeners, interview questions and an interview matrix were developed for positions added in the Restructuring Plan presented to Deputy Commissioner Stacy Smith. Educator Licensure Unit and GRESC have also assisted the district with tracking all staff that are working under the Act 1240 waiver as well as ensuring AQT is a consideration for job assignments.

District staff and OCSS met with Dr. Brent Miller about the state's Teacher Residency Program. Next steps include ensuring Intro to Teaching, Ed Tech and Child Growth and Development are taught on site; confirm there is an MOU in place with PCCUA; schedule a time to meet with the Ed Rising class at CHS. In addition, Ms. Britton will check to see if there are any seniors that have taken all three ed prep courses because they could take the Praxis for Paras and become a Certified Teaching Assistant. Ed Rising students are also involved in the Arkansas Tutoring Corps, a partnership between the Arkansas Department of Education and the Office of Education Renewal Zones. This program will provide the elementary students additional tutoring opportunities during the after school program while giving the high school students interested in a career in education the chance to actually teach young students and attend high quality professional development.

District Operations and Governance

The first draft of a Standard Operating Procedures Manual has been completed and is currently under review by Dr. McGee and OCSS. Assistance has been provided to identify the current reality of district operations and note areas that are creating barriers to seamless operations. Dr. McGee is planning a review and recommended revision of all policies, but is waiting for the new district level positions to be in place before beginning the work. Arkansas Public School Resource Center is also providing support as they work with Dr. McGee to update the current salary schedule and to plan for the upcoming school year: staffing needs, funding sources, etc.

Facilities and Transportation

Phase II of the gym project is underway. This will be funded through the district building fund. As mentioned earlier, a wellness area for the elementary school at the elementary school has been submitted and the district is awaiting final approval. Currently, there is no playground for students in grades 1-6; rather, they are confined to a small area in front of the building for recess time where there is no equipment and no area for organized games. The district is hopeful they can move forward with this project using ARP ESSER III funds.