



# DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

## **Lee County 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.

## **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 of Level 5 Support**

### **January - March 2022**

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 approximately 4 days per week 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 PLC coaches. At this time, the coordination of various supports has been pivotal in everyone working together for positive outcomes. Literacy instruction throughout the district remains a priority. Consistent support from Dallas Henderson, DESE RISE specialist has continued during the first quarter of second semester. Student and staff engagement at the high school continues to be a priority. The administration has set and communicated instructional expectations for teachers at both campuses. These expectations are monitored through classroom visits by the building leadership teams. The faculty is supportive of the efforts.

### **Student Support**

This year the district has renewed efforts to implement an effective Multi Tiered System of Support ( MTSS ) at both schools. The district has a designated PBIS Coordinator in each building and teams are working to implement it with integrity. Teams from both buildings in the district have attended training with Dr. Ruby Payne and Dr. Weber as well as training focused on the RTI process. The teams have also worked with Solution Tree to tie the work of improving instruction with the work of improving behavior outcomes. Moreover, teams from the district representing both campuses have attended several Solution Tree training sessions providing the staff better understanding of multi-tiers of support. Instructional support staff have shared the highlights of the meetings as well as next steps based on the new learning with the district school improvement team during the regular monthly meetings. To ensure the attendance at the sessions impacts student learning and teacher practice, it is important that the district team plans how and when to share the information with teachers and how this will be integrated into each school's improvement plan. Superintendent Murdock had the opportunity to attend a site visit to White River School District in Washington along with several district leaders from Arkansas. As a result of the visit, she plans to facilitate a district leadership team book study group using the book *Leading PLCs Districtwide: From the Boardroom to the Classroom*. The book study coupled with the PLC training sessions will promote conversations among the team that will lead to the application of new ideas in classrooms and improvement of existing skills.

### **Human Capital**

The district continues to understand that recruiting and retaining a sustainable and qualified teacher workforce is paramount to the work of the district. All other initiatives related to

curriculum, teaching, and learning are in vain if they do not have a sustainable teacher workforce that can deliver high quality instruction to students on a daily basis. To that end, the district continues to seek creative ways to provide a strategic advantage in regard to recruitment and retention of an educator workforce.

Both building principals have identified areas where they predict turnover will take place. The district distributed letters of intent in February to gain an understanding of who may not be coming back next year. Upon receipt of these letters, the district began to plan for staffing. Both building leaders have developed rough draft master schedules and begun to work with district leadership to post positions that will be needed for the 2022-2023 school year.

The district is increasing partnerships with local universities to create mutually beneficial relationships in which the university is able to send students to teach lessons, meet with teachers, and mentor students; in exchange, the future teachers *experience* Lee County School District with a potential outcome of the interns viewing a teaching job at the district as a viable option. In addition, the district is pursuing international teachers who are fully certified to come to the district for employment and is completing the design year of Opportunity Culture with the plan to begin year one during the next school year. Finally, the district has plans to implement the residency model that DESE has created to target a grow-your-own-model. With this final piece in place, the district will have a holistic approach to recruiting qualified teachers as they will be growing their own teacher pipeline and working to strategically recruit from outside the district.

## **Academics**

Student data from a variety of sources are displayed and analyzed in designated rooms at both campuses. In an effort to motivate students to take ownership of their own progress and set appropriate goals, the interim assessment data have been reviewed one-on-one with high school students and students in the elementary school are also encouraged to track their individual progress using progress logs provided with the iReady adaptive program for both math and literacy. Besides being posted in the data room, data by grade level are displayed in the hallways so students can see the growth that is taking place.

As a result of the district leadership's belief in the value of instructional support for teachers through coaching and job embedded professional development, both campuses have instructional facilitators and coaches to model lessons, provide feedback based on observations and facilitate regular collaborative team meetings. The district has purchased high quality instructional material (HQIM) for all K-12 ELA classrooms and provides support as needed to implement the programs with integrity. New math curriculum was purchased this year for the high school and the leadership team is planning to research possible HQIM for elementary mathematics, specifically looking for materials that provide logical instructional progression, teacher guidance on introducing concepts and building a deeper understanding of mathematical topics. Nonetheless, all of the aforementioned instructional support and resources do not replace the need for effective teachers in every classroom to ensure high levels of learning for all students. Thus, the need for an effective recruitment and retention plan which will be updated during summer work sessions at the district.

During the second semester, there has been a concentrated focus at both schools to provide targeted literacy interventions based on data from interim and classroom assessments. ELA teachers in grades 3-12 began the implementation of 95% Group Multisyllabic Routine cards. As with the implementation of any new program, continued support through coaching and professional development is needed and is being provided by a variety of human capital resources. In addition to decoding instruction through 95% Group sessions, ELA intervention teachers at the high school are providing encoding lessons based on needs identified through a feature analysis of the DSA assessment administered in the fall. At the high school, the instructional support team collaborated with Solution Tree coaches to develop a 30 Day plan for providing summative assessment preparation lessons prior to administering the ACT Aspire. Teachers will be providing instruction using content-related informational text to provide students with a variety of opportunities to read and respond to questions related to the nonfiction passages. An initial assessment of skills taught during the ELA intervention block revealed a small number of students are in need of additional intervention. Students will be assessed at the end of the 10 Day Cycle to identify skill deficits to be addressed during the next cycle of instruction. The DESE RISE Specialist and OCSS have worked closely with the elementary team to assist in interpreting data to identify specific student needs and to plan for small group instruction. Addressing learning loss during the after-school programs, core instruction and intervention periods support the ongoing work of overcoming the negative impact the pandemic has had on students.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

The district has engaged with the local Rotary through presentations about K-12 programs presented by the principals and the district G.T. Coordinator. Rotarian members have offered support for various programs and emphasized that they are pleased with the direction the district is headed. The superintendent plans to spotlight the team during the May Rotary Meeting. Other community stakeholder engagement opportunities included celebrating the accomplishments of the basketball team hosting a Saturday “Spring Fling for the Trojan Team where over 200 people enjoyed this event with community partners grilling, providing bounce houses for children, and a DJ for the day. Community partners have also provided voter registration materials and financial literacy information to high school students. Both schools reported a great turn out during Parent/ Teacher Conference day. The district is also celebrating the success of their Odyssey of the Mind program. The school started the program this year at Anna Strong Learning Academy and placed 1st at the regional tournament. They will be representing the district at state in April. Finally, the district provided services for the community including healthy eating sessions hosted at both schools and an anti-vaping presentation at the high school.

### **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 is being updated as the team meets and finalizes written operating procedures. The document will be submitted to the DESE Fiscal Department for review and feedback.

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 the 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 the annual budget.

Action	Completion Date
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