

Helena West Helena Analysis

Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner

Helena West Helena was classified as In Need of Level 5 Support by the State Board of Education (SBE) during the July 2022 meeting. The SBE directed the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to conduct a system's analysis of the district to determine immediate actions and additional support needed. The Office of Coordinated Support and Service (OCSS) in collaboration with various divisions of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) conducted a system analysis of the district. During the review some findings required immediate action and were considered critical to the start of school. Those items are listed at the beginning of this report along with the action taken by DESE. Additional areas of concern with recommendations for follow-up are listed under Additional Support Needed. This analysis will be used to establish a Plan of Support with exit criteria for the Helena West Helena School District.

Immediate Attention Required

Items notes under this section required immediate action

Administration and Governance

OCSS Staff and Public School Accountability

Findings

After initial conversations, observations, and direct support from the Office of Coordinated Support and Service it was determined that there was not sufficient organizational leadership in place. Clear job descriptions and responsibilities were not evident at the central office and staff was in a reactive role, instead of strategic leadership.

Review of previous board minutes and board observations revealed a divided board. At times, the board members seemed not to trust or have confidence in recommendations of the superintendent or board president. On at least two occasions without being on the agenda motions were made during board meetings to remove the current board president. The vote on said motions demonstrated a divided board and ended with the current board president remaining in position. Additionally it was clear that overreach into the daily operations of the school district was occurring regularly and that a balance of power between the board of directors and the superintendent was not established. The board did attempt to follow Robert's Rules of Orders, but there was a lack of fidelity or understanding.

Immediate Action

In July, the State Board of Education directed Commissioner Johnny Key to oversee all personnel decisions for the Helena West Helena School District. Dr. Keith McGee, former Deputy Superintendent of Little Rock, was appointed as Superintendent of Helena West Helena effective July 25, 2022. Ms. Joyce Anderson returned to her former position as Curriculum Coordinator and was compensated for her days as interim Superintendent.

Dr. McGee has met with each board member to establish a relationship and begin putting into place a board structure that is functional and follows policy. He has reorganized the board agenda in an effort to streamline meetings. The superintendent is reviewing all external vendor contracts that require board approval to determine purpose of contract, value of contract and evaluation of services. A directive was communicated to all leadership that contracts can only be entered into with Helena School District through the office of the superintendent. The district continues to have board meetings since Dr. McGee was appointed and at this time the local board members are working with him to move the district forward. Continued emphasis on board relationships, organizational structure, and separation of powers between superintendent and board will continue to be a priority. Board training is planned for the month of September with an emphasis on roles and responsibilities of board members; superintendent and board relations; parliamentary procedure and financial status of the district.

Multiple times since July, OCSS staff and Dr. McGee have been approached by community and staff members who voice that the board is the divisive system within the community and school system. It is our belief that this stems from a lack of trust and transparency of multiple parties over time. At this time, Dr. McGee is committed to working with board members to change this perception of the board and together move the district forward.

Personnel Recommendations / Master Schedule

OCSS Staff and Division of Teacher Effectiveness

Findings

The DESE team conducted a staffing analysis which included reviewing all current staff, current positions, licensure qualifications, current schedules, and Standards for Accreditation requirements; it was determined that immediate action was needed to reorganize some staff and adjust schedules to meet requirements and better serve students in the core classroom. The district seemed to give little consideration to current educator licenses while developing schedules or making teacher assignments (e.g., licensed educators in positions that are not required; licensed math teaching elementary while an unlicensed teacher in middle school math; licensed staff assigned to interventions with non-licensed assignments to core subjects). It could be argued that the impetus for this assignment practice is the result of an open 1240 waiver of teacher licensure requirements many years ago. In contrast, it was noted that the district has several special education teachers who are fully certified; federal law does not allow the waiver from licensure for special education leaving the district with no other option than to fill needed positions with licensed staff.

Elementary: Prior to school starting, there was no one fully licensed in 1st grade or 4th grade. Both grade levels had vacancies. 1st grade had two vacancies and 4th grade had one vacancy. There were at least 3 licensed educators in non-classroom positions who could be reassigned to fill the vacancies.

High School: Vacant positions at the school include volleyball coach, part-time counselor, foreign language, and special education teacher. Many of the core classes are assigned to unlicensed staff, while several licensed staff are assigned to ACT computer based prep classes with small class sizes; this course is not required for graduation and can be facilitated by a classified paraprofessional.

- The master schedule is confusing and there is no evidence of intentional/strategic teaching assignments. A significant number of teachers that were in the schedule have resigned since last school year, but were not removed from the master schedule. New teachers have not been added to eSchool.
- To avoid a class load violation, several JAG students attached to teachers, but not actually planned to teach or oversee JAG.
- There likely will be an overage of staff at high school unless the unlicensed teachers can be appropriately assigned.
- During the DESE site visit, it was evident that District leadership is unclear regarding the number of International teachers and their arrival date. Arrival for some is delayed due to Visas. International teachers are needed to fill core content areas- concern about the availability
- Large number of licensed teachers in master schedule are assigned to ALE and credit recovery for multiple courses.
- Relatively few electives are available.
- Several courses listed in the master schedule as “concurrent” courses. It is unclear whether these courses will be taught by PCCUA instructors and if students will be on the HWH campus or college campus. The concurrent agreement was not approved by the board until the August meeting.
- Teachers assigned with the most students are not licensed educators
- Number of teachers licensed to teach the course/s assigned in master schedule: 8
- Teachers in master schedule who are not licensed: 10-12
- Anticipated International Teachers: 9
- The master schedule had no minimum requirement for a class to “make”. (e.g., offering 4 Algebra III courses with only 4 students in a class or ACT prep-not required assigned to licensed staff.
- In need of .5 counselors based on the number of students at high school.
- The district must also review student records in TRIAND to determine on-time to graduate and eSchool schedules to determine if students are fully scheduled in courses needed.

Immediate Action

Dr. McGee has diligently worked with OCSS staff and building administrators to adjust teaching assignments and the master schedule. This has been stressful for all involved with reassignments so close to school. Several personnel recommendations were made to Commissioner Key and reassignments of licensed staff in the elementary school that were assigned to non-classroom positions have been placed in vacant classroom positions. Currently, OCSS and district staff are analyzing staffing to identify staffing inefficiencies as well as reviewing funding sources for classified positions to maximize the use of restricted funds. The

following chart is the current teaching assignments at the elementary level after licensed teachers were reassigned to classroom positions. At this time, there are now more licensed classroom teachers than non-licensed.

Grade	Licensed	Non-licensed	International
K	3	1	
1	2*	3	
2	2		1
3	1	2	
4	1*	1	1
5	2-Provisional		1
6	1 1-Provisional	1 (Pending Provisional)	
Total	13	8	3

*Moved into a classroom per recommendation from Supt. McGee, DESE and OCSS.

Note: 16 out of 24 educators have completed 6 days of RISE Academy.

DESE is recommending a lead teacher role and compensating identified teachers to mentor and assist non-licensed teachers at both schools. Lead teachers are being identified and a job description has been written for the new roles. All staff are expected to have a full course schedule at the high school. If someone does not have a full schedule, they will be assigned to co-teach or assist in another class. Significant changes have been made to the master schedule for staffing and course efficiency. Oral communication is being embedded in English, however this requires approval. The district is working with Learning Services to complete the embedded course request.

The high school still has two vacant positions: volleyball coach and special education teacher. The counseling position has been filled with a certified teacher who has expressed a desire to be a counselor. Per recommendation, the principal spoke to her and she will be teaching 2 periods, 1 prep, and 4 periods counselor. The other classes she was teaching were assigned to certified teachers who did not have full class loads. The master schedule has been altered at the high school and licensed staff that was assigned to teach non-core classes have been assigned to core classes. The majority of core subjects are now covered by licensed staff at the high school.

Transportation

OCSS Staff and Tim Cain, Director of Facilities and Transportation

Finding

- The district was failing to provide adequate school bus transportation.
- The district failed to ensure that drivers met Arkansas School Bus Driver Qualifications;
- The district did not have route narratives or lists of stops per route; the district cannot predict the pick-up or drop-off time for students who do ride the bus, resulting in students frequently arriving at school one to two hours late according to the transportation director;
- The 2021-22 inspections show twelve buses (in good repair at the time of inspection) but the transportation director indicated that they have been running only two of the buses and make repeated trips until they cover the district, causing those late arrivals.
- Both the previous district superintendent and transportation director expressed more concern about how athletic teams would get to away games than they did about getting students to school on a daily basis.
- After a review of the district's buses, bus driver records, and transportation practices, our findings indicate that the district will need to run at least six-eight routes both morning and afternoon to ensure that all students can be in attendance for a full day in the classroom setting.
- It is further indicated that the district will need to ensure that all school bus driver requirements are met prior to putting drivers in the driver's seats of those buses. The district must transport students in such a way as to avoid the loss of academic time for those students who utilize the school bus. No school buses should be used for extra-curricular activities if that use (either of the bus or the driver) interferes with transportation of students to and from school and the educational opportunities therein. Every member of the transportation staff should hold a CDL with Passenger and School Bus Endorsements.

Immediate Action

Department staff directly supported the district by establishing bus routes and ensuring that all personnel records and bus drivers met the requirements. Commissioner Key has approved several personnel recommendations for bus drivers, therefore the transportation plan for Helena West Helena was ready by the first day of school. The Division of Facilities and Transportation will continue to monitor and provide direct support overseeing the proper training for all drivers.

Special Education Services

OCSS Staff and DESE Special Education

Findings

Based on a monitoring visit that occurred in March and the lack of corrective action taken by the district the district is being issued a Compliance Action Plan (CAP) for the areas of Evaluation Procedures and Individualized Education Programs. The district did not have a district LEA director in place and there is concern about quality of services and proper documentation in student's IEP folders.

Immediate Action

The district has hired an LEA director, OCSS staff is working directly with the new

director to provide intensive support. The district will need to review all students who had an eligibility change from Intellectual Disability to another eligibility category to see how the eligibility determination was made. DESE-OSE will have monthly check-in meetings with the Special Education Supervisor and will make onsite visits to review required corrections for the CAP and provide other needed TA. DESE-OSE and OCSS continue special education classroom observations when onsite in the district.

Additional Support Needed

Items noted under this section will require additional support throughout this school year.

Guidance and Counseling Program

Andrea Fortner, DESE Counseling Program Manager

Analysis: Guidance and Counseling unit reviewed the state required 2022 Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

Findings:

- Plan scored in the limited (lowest) category.
- One additional counselor needed to comply with student /counselor ratio of 1:450.
- The High School Counselor is not in compliance with 90:10 due to other assigned administrative tasks.

Recommendations:

- Hiring a high school counselor. 5 (resolved)
- Technical assistance to improve district Comprehensive School Counseling Plan
- Redistribute some administrative tasks to current employees. The district is working to remove the clerical tasks that have historically been assigned to counselors. The tasks are being assigned to current classified staff and the staff are receiving needed training from APSCN and DESE.
- Monthly zoom meetings with DESE Counseling Program Manager to review Critical Task Calendar and school's progress toward task completion and to provide technical support as needed.

Human Capital for Special Education Staff

Yvonne Greene, DESE Special Education

Analysis: Human Capital for Special Education Staff

Findings: District use of paraprofessionals is focused on special education environments only, regardless of the level of student need in the class or number of students in the class. District does not utilize paraprofessionals to increase access or as a service in the general education environment. Every resource classroom has a paraprofessional. This is not common in other districts. Last year any student who qualified for special education received all core instruction in either resource or self-contained classes.

Recommendations: Review student needs and structure of special education services. Do all

students need resource support for science and social studies as practiced across all campuses in the district? Utilize staff to increase access to the general education setting for students with disabilities. The high school has scheduled students with disabilities in gen ed course codes (ending in 8) for all subject areas for 22-23 school year. We are concerned about the level of support students may need to meet the course standards, if the prerequisite foundations are not present for the student. Shifting from total resources to none may not fully address student needs without the implementation of a core+more model.

Literacy Support Plan

Carol Heringer, Educational Ombudsman
Traci Holland, PSA

Analysis: Based on the district being classified in Need of Level 4 Support due to prior literacy scores, the district had a Literacy Plan and a DESE Plan of Support. Reviewed DESE Plan of Support along with Helena/West Helena's District Support Plan and Literacy Plan of Support

Findings:

- The district has approved curriculum in place: Open Court for K-2; Wonders 3-6; 95% Group; My Perspectives 7-12; implementation is lacking with 30 minute blocks; some training/PD has occurred with more planned this school year (see District Literacy Plan linked below)
- Some new teachers have begun RISE training at Great Rivers during the summer but there will be more new hires which will need RISE training; Great Rivers was asked to add a cohort this fall to begin this training.

Recommendations: Continue monthly support meetings regarding the DESE Plan of Support as well as follow up with the district on providing curriculum training through vendors (95% Group, My Perspectives). Additionally, follow up with Great Rivers to ensure new teachers are receiving RISE training and support.

Assessment

Sheree Baird, DESE Assessment Program Manager

Analysis: Reviewed submitted test irregularities, attendance of required DTC test trainings, test participation, and test scores

Findings:

- The District Test Coordinator from Helena/W.Helena did not submit any test irregularities for the 2021-22 school year. *
- In regards to training, our records indicate that the DTC attended almost all required DTC training except the training for WorkKeys and Closing out the Aspire portal.
- For spring 2022 test participation, Helena/W. Helena tested 100% of their EL students and 100% of their graduating seniors passing the HS Civics Exam. Additionally, Helena tested approximately 76% of their Grade 11 ACT students, and approximately 95% of Aspire students at the high school and approximately 99% of Aspire students at their elementary campus during the spring of 2022. They did not test any of their high school students on WorkKeys this past year; however, it's possible that they offered it to students and they didn't have anyone that chose to participate.

- Test scores at all grades and content areas are significantly below the state average.

Recommendations: The two areas of greatest concern is that Helena-West Helena has a new DTC this year who will need significant support learning the various test portals and providing training to staff. The second major area of concern is the need for Helena-West Helena to review test data to inform areas that need improvement in instruction across all grades and content areas.

*The OCSS staff along with PSA assisted HWH in submitting assessment corrections for the first time in several years.

Science of Reading

Sandy Shepard, RISE Lead Specialist

Analysis: The district has begun this process, but with the amount of turnover there are several teachers who need to either complete training or be trained in all six days. Assessors from both elementary and high school have begun their training, but only one is complete.

Findings: Science of Reading training: Wahl Elementary teachers who are in place have started RISE training, but there are 3 spots to fill, and several novice teachers who will be new to the district who have not started the training. Great Rivers plans to do another round of RISE training after all new teachers are in place and after school starts.

Implementation of best reading practices following the science of reading are lacking in the classrooms based on observations.

***Findings:** Science of Reading training 1 of 3 building administrators have completed Science or Reading Assessor Academy

Recommendations: Continue to encourage principals to complete their assessor training so they can begin coaching their teachers in the SoR. Work with the Co-op to be creative in planning the RISE Training days since it is often hard to find substitutes.

*As of August 29th, principals have completed SoR Assessor Academy.

Dyslexia

Vicki King, DESE Dyslexia Specialist

Analysis: Reviewed the 2021-22 district website posting and the 2021-22 Dyslexia Report (Cycle 7 data).

Findings: The district website posting indicates:

- The Barton Reading And Spelling Program is used for dyslexia interventions
- The report indicates 40 students received dyslexia intervention during the 2021-22 school year.
- 42 students are reported as identified as exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia
- Previous dyslexia trained interventionist is no longer in current position. The district is having to identify and train new personnel

2022 Cycle 7 Dyslexia Report

- The report indicates 42 students received dyslexia intervention during the 2021-22 school year.
- The students served are in grades 5-11.

Recommendations:

- DESE Dyslexia Specialist can work with GRESC Dyslexia Specialist to conduct an audit of dyslexia implementation.
- Support district in developing a plan to implement screening and comprehensive dyslexia intervention services for all students exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia.

English of Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Tricia Kerr, DESE ESOL Specialist

Analysis: 21-22 EL Plan accepted after revisions, district has 1 English Learner, district had 2 educators with ESL endorsement in 21-22, but 1 (previous ESOL Coordinator) has left. Verified that the prior ESOL Coordinator is no longer an employee.

Findings: Currently no designated ESOL Coordinator

Recommendations: DESE and regional ESOL specialists are ready to assist once a new ESOL coordinator is named.

* The Superintendent has assigned the role of ESOL Coordinator to the District School Improvement Specialist.

Student Success Plans

Andrea Fortner, DESE Counselor

Analysis: Student Success Plan Documents

Findings: During the 21-22 school year, technical assistance was provided in the development of the Student Success Plan (SSP) document and course catalog. Some SSPs were completed in the English classrooms. At last check, they were not completed for all students.

Recommendations: Technical assistance in the implementation of SSPs to all students 8-12th

Career and Technical Education

Ross White, CTE Director

Analysis: 2021-2022 CTE Program Approvals

Findings: From the program approval linked above. Helena/West Helena does not have three programs of study in three occupational areas to meet SFA. We currently allow a secondary career

center to suffice for one program of study to meet SFA which they do. However, for equity and access purposes they should be able to maintain three programs in three occupational areas on their campus.

Recommendations:

- Review of their current POS with enrollment numbers and participation in the required co-curricular career and technical student organization (CTSO).
- Review alignment of CTE POS with local labor market data.
- Engagements with the CTE Consortia has been lacking according to the CTE coordinator. Teachers are not attending professional development or engaging with their business and industry partners.

Career and Technical Education (JAG)

Ross White, CTE Director

Analysis: JAG 2020 Report, JAG 2021 Report

Findings: For the last two years Helena/West Helena JAG program has not entered any information in the system (ENDMS) but the student profiles. They created a roster for both school's years 20/21 and 21/22, but no model services, follow ups, or progress reports were entered. Model services are used for tracking the contact made with each participant that is in their program and tracks the specific JAG competencies being taught and the level of attainment of those competencies. Without this information being entered in the system, we have no way of tracking progress or outcomes of their program.

Recommendations: Complete audit of JAG program and intensive support from the DCTE JAG team to assist the specialist in completing their required reporting.

Fiscal Operations

Dr. Eric Saunders, Asst. State Superintendent-Fiscal Services and Support

Analysis: Conducted a quick analysis of the following reports and performed an onsite interview with business office staff.

Balances, Enrollment, and Staffing: Overall, the balances for net legal balance and building fund do not pose an immediate concern and have appeared stable over time with fluctuations in enrollment. This could be due to staffing adjustments done to reflect current enrollment. Future expenses such as gymnasium upgrades and sign costs need to be evaluated to determine the impact.

Cycle Reports: The district has submitted most of their cycle reports on time for the last three years. At the end of each year, cycle 9 has been late. The due date for the 21-22 has not occurred at the time of this report.

Bank Variances: While there has been a variance over some months the past three years, the amounts are not significant and do not seem to carry forward.

Audit Findings: While there were three audit findings in 2018-2019, there were not any in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021. The 2021-2022 audit has not been performed at this point.

Staff Questions: Two staff members perform most of the financial duties for the district. Following interviews these concerns were noted:

- o Segregation of duties.
- o Clear understanding of procedures.
- o Updated procedures manual to reflect current staff.
- o Appropriate training provided to all applicable staff and board members.

Recommendations:

- Update current policy and procedures to reflect current staff and best practices. The policies and procedures should be always readily available.
- Training of staff in new manuals and procedures.
- Accountability protocol established to ensure following procedures.
- Tier two training provided to all applicable staff. At a minimum, two hours of annual training for employees who are involved in the process of recording and/or reporting of financial transactions but:
 - o Do not make decisions about selecting codes, or
 - o Have a limited number of codes they can useThis would include building principals, building secretaries, Athletic Director, Maintenance Supervisor, Transportation Supervisor, etc. depending upon local organization and procedures.
- Cash deposits should be made by appropriate financial staff.
- Staff contracts and payout amounts should be checked throughout the year by a person other than Ms. Rodgers or Ms. Mills.
- Monthly fund balances should be monitored by additional personnel including those responsible for their respective programs.
- Appropriate board training regarding financial matters should be performed and properly documented.

Fiscal Operations- Special Education

Josh Hart and Yvonne Greene

Analysis: Special Education Fiscal practices

Findings: Failure to timely and accurately submit required special education fiscal documents. Worked extensively with LEA supervisor and bookkeeper to ensure CCEIS funds were used as indicated and all carryover spent so no payback required.

Recommendations: As part of the cycle monitoring, conduct a Tier 4 on-site fiscal monitoring in conjunction with program cycle monitoring. Require the new LEA supervisor and the business manager to attend fiscal TA scheduled around fiscal submissions.

