



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Pine Bluff School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

October - December 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner

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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.

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. Crystal Green-Braswell, Leadership Development Coach, is on-site at least one day a week providing principal support. Jamie Reid, OCSS Fiscal Support, is on-site at least one day a week directly supporting the business manager and business office. Alicia Whiteside, DESE RISE specialist directly assists building level school improvement specialists on-site weekly. 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

There was a strong focus on dyslexia screening for the district this quarter. All students kindergarten through twelfth grade were given reading screeners and appropriate diagnostic assessments to determine further needs. Currently the district has a dyslexia specialist on each campus. There are 136 students receiving dyslexia interventions. This quarter the

district dyslexia specialist and the dyslexia team have identified over 150 students that will receive further assessments to determine intervention placement. Through this process, the district is continuing to add students with characteristics of dyslexia in the appropriate intervention. Dyslexia specialists will continue assessments after the holiday break. It is expected that the district will be providing services to over 200 students by spring 2023.

OCSS Behavior Support Specialist provided an overview of leading SmartData conversations with the building principals. During the overview, a template to guide the discussions was provided for each principal in efforts to streamline student intervention teams across the district. SmartData indicates an influx of student discipline data with a larger percentage identified as insubordination. The district leadership team regards the influx as a positive, as it shows the schools are more accurately reporting. The data provided an opportunity for the district leadership team to ensure each campus has the same understanding and consistent process for the infraction, insubordination.

Human Capital

Due to the lack of fully licensed applicants, principals have had to hire teachers that have not obtained licensure or are teaching out of the licensure area. Ensuring the district has employed human capital to meet the requirements for standards has been an area of focus this quarter. District retention and recruitment director along with assistant superintendent worked collaboratively with DESE educator effectiveness support to identify human capital needs and set goals. District goals include, creating a written hiring protocol that is shared and reviewed by all supervisors in charge of making hiring recommendations; provide training to all leaders regarding the protocol, and securing human capital that meets all accreditation requirements. There are a few positions that are currently being filled by long term substitutes.

Academics

All campuses have created a master schedule to include a specific intervention time (W.I.N.). District administration has identified W.I.N. time as a district non-negotiable. The district is utilizing 95% Group Curriculum resources to provide skill based interventions and track progress. One elementary school had 40% of the students receiving interventions make progress during the first three weeks of interventions.

The district has ordered new science and social studies texts along with additional supplemental literacy curriculum resources. The district LEA has ensured that all students have access to the core curriculum materials.

District administration has created a focus walk tool that is shared among leaders. The leadership conducts district focus walks each month. The results of the walks are reviewed with building leaders in efforts to create a consistent district model for classroom instruction.

The focus for this quarter was determining if classrooms had access and were utilizing district purchased curriculum materials. The focus will continue to expand looking further into student engagement with materials and grade level standards.

This quarter the district took time to celebrate statewide recognition following the release of the 2021-22 ACT Aspire scores. Four Pine Bluff Schools: Dollarway High School, Pine Bluff High School, Jack Robey Middle School, and Robert F. Morehead Middle School received “Beating the Odds” honors from the Office for Education Policy. In addition, Dollarway High School was honored as a school with “The Best Growth Scores Overall”. These OEP awards are for schools whose students are demonstrating high academic growth despite serving a population where at least 66% of the students participate in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program, which is based on low household income. Schools serving such student populations often struggle to demonstrate high academic achievement, subsequently receiving lower letter grades.

Family and Community Engagement

This quarter, Pine Bluff School District Community Advisory Committee released the district strategic plan. The committee along with community leaders created a plan that includes five strategies that address expanding learning opportunities for students, creating safer environments, improving school facilities, increasing the number of excellent teachers and leaders, and building trust in the district. Each of the strategies will be implemented over the next five years.

[PBSD Strategic Plan](#)

Facilities and Transportation

Pine Bluff School District safety improvements have continued throughout this quarter. The district has secured all building entrances with card code access. Each campus has a security guard welcoming visitors at the main entrance. Pine Bluff High School’s campus safety fence is almost complete. Completion date is estimated for January 9, 2023 due to the upcoming installation of two safety gates.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

The State Board of Education voted to authorize a limited authority board for Pine Bluff School District. A sub-committee appointed by the Commissioner of Education and SBE President Newton reviewed 30 applications and conducted interviews to determine recommendations for the seven zone positions. The new board members are Ms. Lozanne Calhoun, Dr. Stephen Broughton, Dr. Charles Colen, Ms. Jomeka Edwards, Ms. Lori Guelache, Dr. Sederick Rice, and Mr. Ricky Whitmore. Board training will be provided to the board members in January by the Arkansas School Boards Association. Once initial training is completed by all board members then they will conduct business as a limited authority

board reviewing and making recommendations to the Commissioner of Education on all matters considered by an elected board.

As part of the transition to a new board it was decided that a new Superintendent be appointed to assist in the transition of governance. Ms. Jennifer Barbaree, former OCSS Assistant State Superintendent who has worked directly with the district, was named Superintendent December 20th. A priority focus will be the organization and management of the business office.

The DESE Fiscal Support and Services Unit in coordination with OCSS provides ongoing support to the district through onsite visits and remote assistance. OCSS financial support has focused on cleaning up the operating budget, budget coding errors, budgeting of federal allocations, and reconciling the monthly bank statement. The district annual audit took place during this quarter. Results of the audit indicate required corrections centered around accurate documentation.