

Pine Bluff School District Exit Criteria Review

Submitted by: Sheila Whitlow

Associate Deputy Commissioner, Office of Coordinated Support and Service
Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

On September 13, 2018, the Pine Bluff School District (PBSD) was classified as in Fiscal Distress. The Arkansas State Board of Education (SBE) 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 requested Level 5 Support and state authority was reaffirmed by the SBE. The Dollarway School District was officially annexed into the PBSD on July 1, 2021. All schools within the previous Dollarway School District remained open and now operate as part of the PBSD and policies.

While the initial focus was to improve the overall academics and fiscal stability of the district, the district was in a multi-system failure that exacerbated the need for intensive support in the following six school systems: student support, human capital, academics, family and community engagement, facilities and transportation, and fiscal governance and district operations. Efforts to create a better culture and climate in the district that would combat declining enrollment and teacher turnover was undertaken in the early years of state authority. Responding to Covid during year 3 of state authority was a challenge, but the focus remained on school improvement and student safety. However, after a year of mostly virtual instruction and limited transitions all students returned to campus. The community and the school faced unprecedented loss of life due to gang violence. Securing a safe school environment became the most pressing priority for all campuses. Efforts and partnerships with the city and local law enforcement were established and early signs of success have been noted.

As a result of significant improvements within the district in various key areas the SBE appointed a limited authority board in December 2022, moving the district one step closer to local control by November 2023. The limited authority board members have exhibited exemplary performance since their appointments and as an entity has proven its capability to govern the district effectively. During its meeting on August 10, 2023, the SBE invited the PBSD limited board to present a proposal to the SBE in September in order to ensure a seamless governance transition and bring stability to the district. Additionally, a team of leadership development coaches from the Office of Coordinated Support and Service (OCSS) under the direction of Deputy Commissioner Stacy Smith and led by Sheila Whitlow, Associate Deputy Commissioner, conducted a two-day monitoring visit to verify artifacts, view implementation,

visit classrooms, and interview staff and administration. The following summary sets forth the findings of the OCSS pertaining to the exit criteria established for PBSB.

Pine Bluff School District Exit Criteria Summary and Final Rating		
Rating Scale: Artifacts and evidence including data collected during site visits will be used to identify a rating on a scale of 1 - 4: (1) Minimal Progress (2) Partially Met w/ Direct Support (3) Met w/ Direct Support (4) Met- Independent		
Overall Exit Criteria Rating		3.13
<p><u>Exit Criteria Indicator 1</u> Collaborative teams regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students.</p> <p>The district has provided clear direction regarding the process and structure of the collaborative team meeting. The focus of these meetings is predominantly centered on curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Evidence exists that collaborative teams are scheduled to meet regularly in all buildings. These meetings are scheduled twice weekly during the contractual day, and a clear process to guide the work of teams is documented. Teams have established norms and utilize data available to guide discussions; however, some teams are functioning at higher levels than others. District and building level administrators are actively engaged in leading the collaborative team meetings. While a well-established process and structure for collaborative team meetings is regularly employed for core teachers, teachers of non-core subjects and ancillary support specialists (i.e. counselors, behavior specialists, interventionists) are not consistently included in collaborative team meetings. Non-core teachers neither consistently participate in the core collaborative team meetings nor conduct their own collaborative team meetings. Moreover, ancillary support staff are not consistently included in the process for review of affective and behavioral data provided during the collaborative team process.</p>		
Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 1 Score:		3.35
Objective 1.1	Collaborative Teams meet weekly and spend 90% of their meeting time discussing and working on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.	3.62
Objective 1.2	School and district leaders regularly examine PLC collaborative teams' progress toward their goals. This is evident from a written plan to monitor and any artifacts of the monitorings.	3.28
Objective 1.3	The schools have schedules that allow for collaborative team meetings within the contractual day. This is evident from a review of schedules.	4.00

Objective 1.4	The school has outlined a specific collaborative process to guide teams in their work. This is evident from written norms, use of data and copies of common assessments.	3.19
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Exit Criteria Indicator 2

The school is aware of and monitors predominant instructional practices.

The evidence demonstrates school leaders do possess knowledge of predominant instructional practices within their assigned school; however, a written outline of these practices has not been developed and communicated to staff. Instructional expectations are articulated from district to some school level staff. While feedback is generated and provided to teachers, the feedback does not always lead to improvements in instructional practice. As demonstrated through documentation, an abundance of work has been done regarding instructional expectations, but consistent implementation at the classroom level has not been observed. Additional professional development for building leadership on how to identify and support effective instructional practices is recommended.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 2 Score:	2.75
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Objective 2.1	Schools in consultation with the district have established expectations of predominant instructional practices. This is evident from a written outline of predominant instructional practices and artifacts of how this information is shared with teachers and staff.	2.50
Objective 2.2	Data from classroom observations are aggregated at the school level to show the predominant instructional practices are being implemented.	2.82
Objective 2.3	School leaders provide forthright feedback on an individual's teaching practices.	3.37
Objective 2.4	School and district leaders are able to clearly identify the predominant practices across the entire school and district and the instructional practices they do not want to see used predominantly.	2.32

Exit Criteria Indicator 3

The school provides teachers with clear, ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with student achievement data.

School leaders are regularly observing teachers and providing feedback regarding practice; however, the district does not have a clear process for monitoring observations and feedback generated. Professional growth plans are generated in collaboration with teachers based on district focus and individual needs. School leadership provides feedback to teachers primarily through observation. Instruction could be improved by including multiple sources of data such as self-reflection and student achievement data. While simply providing feedback and conducting observations is a best practice, those interactions must consistently result in better instructional

practices in all classrooms across the district.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 3 Score:

3.06

Objective 3.1	The school leaders have a schedule indicating frequent observations and feedback to teachers. This schedule and feedback is monitored at the district level.	3.00
Objective 3.2	School Leaders base teacher feedback on multiple sources of information including the use of highly specific rubrics for observation, self-reflections and other data.	2.81
Objective 3.3	Each teacher’s Professional Growth Plan is personalized and is created based on feedback from school leaders. The PGP provides opportunities for career development or addresses areas of deficiency, but is targeted to meet the needs of the teacher’s career development.	3.38

Exit Criteria Indicator 4

The school curriculum and accompanying assessments adhere to state and district standards.

The district has implemented high quality instructional materials to drive the instructional process in each core classroom. Curriculum documents (e.g. maps, models) are prevalent and regularly utilized to direct and inform instruction. Extensive work at both the building and district level has been conducted to identify ideal practices across the school setting. Teachers regularly use collaborative team meetings to review curriculum documents and draft common assessments. Assessment data is reviewed on an ongoing basis for impact on instructional integrity. While a well-developed infrastructure for curriculum and assessment is present and available for use by teachers, the positive impact on student achievement is not clearly observed. The next phase of this work must focus on institutional change in regards to implementation of curriculum and assessment districtwide.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 4 Score:

3.60

Objective 4.1	The school has curriculum documents in place that correlate the written curriculum with the state standards and expectations of the district.	3.48
Objective 4.2	The school has documentation that examines the extent to which assessments accurately measure the written and taught curriculum and student progress as evidenced by ongoing assessment results.	3.52
Objective 4.3	Curriculum Maps are in place referencing the specific standards addressed during specific time frames in the school year.	3.41
Objective 4.4	Collaborative teams meet regularly to analyze the essential content, written and taught curriculum and assessments.	3.59
Objective 4.5	The district has a plan to monitor that this work is being completed.	4.00

Exit Criteria Indicator 5

The school manages its fiscal, operational, and technological resources in a way that directly supports teachers to provide a safe, supportive and collaborative culture and increase student achievement.

Evidence of improved school climate and culture is present throughout the district. The school has provided sufficient materials and supplies in some areas to address the needs of students; however, there is inconsistency in availability of resources across some subject areas. The lack of available and reliable instructional technology is consistently observed as an area of need. Concerns are present surrounding the school day schedule. On some campuses, the schedule maximizes opportunities for teaching and learning. However, there was evidence of schedules at other campuses that depicts a need to ensure optimal attention is given to academic instruction during the scheduled day. District level personnel are tasked with multiple responsibilities; therefore, a more prudent effort to collaborate as well as streamline communication and expectations to building leadership would be helpful so that a clear vision is executed districtwide.

Overall Exit Criteria Indicator 5 Score:		2.87
Objective 5.1	All teachers have the resources they need to effectively teach.	2.94
Objective 5.2	The school leader accesses and leverages multiple resources and funds to support the work of the teachers.	3.34
Objective 5.3	The school-level budgets are developed and protocols are in place to maximize teacher access to resources for teaching and learning.	3.07
Objective 5.4	The school schedule is designed to maximize opportunities for teaching and learning.	2.50
Objective 5.5	The district has a plan to assist schools in a streamlined and effective manner that helps to maximize opportunities for teaching and learning.	2.50

**Pine Bluff School District
Fiscal Distress Exit Criteria**

Rating Scale:

Artifacts and evidence including data collected during site visits will be used to identify a rating on a scale of 1 - 4:

(1) Minimal Progress (2) Partially Met w/ Direct Support (3) Met w/ Direct Support (4) Met- Independently

Overall Fiscal Exit Rating	2.80
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Objectives	Plan Objective	Rating
Objective 1	Review all employee contracts. Verify contracts tie to approved salary/stipend schedules and that employees are performing jobs listed on contracts. Verify contracts to eFinance.	3
Objective 2	Review staffing in relation to ADM. Determine what positions can be eliminated through retirement, resignation or RIF if necessary.	3
Objective 3	Review all vendor contracts and determine necessity and value/cost.	2
Objective 4	Review use and condition of all buildings to determine need and if rent or sale is an option.	3
Objective 5	Review the condition of buses and transportation cost and implement a plan for future purchase or lease.	3
Objective 6	Review all utilities and maintenance expenses to determine if cost savings are available.	3
Objective 7	Review audits and correct findings, put in place safeguards to prevent repeat findings. Provide training to staff to ensure compliance	2
Objective 8	RIF Certified Positions	3
Objective 9	RIF Classified Positions	3
Objective 10	Analyze Legal expenditures and develop a plan to reduce costs	3
Objective 11	Supervision and Monitoring of Compliance with the Arkansas Financial Accounting Manual	3
Objective 12	Supervision and Monitoring of timely payment of accounts payables	3
Objective 13	Reverse the declining balance identified by ADE to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the school district and build a legal balance equal to 10-20% of annual expenditures	3

Overall Exit Criteria Score for Level 5: **3.13 (Met with Direct Support)**

Overall Fiscal Distress Score: : **2.80 (Met with Direct Support)**

Overall Exit Criteria shows steady progress for the district with direct support. The district has established systems in place to support increased student achievement. It is recommended that the district be removed from state authority.