



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Pine Bluff School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

April - June 2022

Submitted by

Office of Coordinated Support & Service

July 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.

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

Submitted: Jennifer Barbaree, Assistant State Superintendent

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. Alicia Whiteside, DESE Literacy specialist also directly assists literacy coaches in the district. 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

This school year Implementing a multi-tiered system of support has been a focus. Building level Student Intervention Teams (SIT) are in place at each campus. Each team includes an administrator, social worker, nurse, teacher, and counselor. The administration team worked in collaboration with OCSS support to update the district handbook to include tiered systems of support and behavior expectations.

DESE dyslexia specialist, along with PSA hosted several support meetings with the district curriculum coordinator and district dyslexia specialist to provide feedback regarding assessments and the district dyslexia protocol. The district is planning to continue dyslexia services for students throughout the summer.

Safety protocols and procedures have improved at Pine Bluff High School. During this quarter, Commissioned Officer Elliot collaborated with Pine Bluff Police Department to provide training to all school security officers along with conducting active shooter drills at both high school campuses. Security training will continue to take place throughout the months of August, September, and October. There has been an increase in incidents of student behavior involving weapons on and near the campus. The PBHS admin team continues to monitor and maintain the supervision plan as a proactive and necessary measure. Strategos International, an independent security firm conducted a risk assessment related to safety and security at Pine Bluff High School. The firm's experts were on-site for two days. During their time on campus they surveyed all areas of the campus as well as the area of the city where the campus is located. Interviews were conducted with campus leadership, teachers, support staff and students. The district is expecting a robust report of their findings and recommendations for next steps that will be considered in securing Pine Bluff High School campus going forward.

Human Capital

Personnel and staffing remains an area of concern in the Pine Bluff School district, as well as many other districts in the state. The district has recently hired two new assistant superintendents starting July 1. The district has also experienced several resignations and retirements this school year. Administrators are reviewing student needs and the master schedule to begin advertising and interviewing for needed positions. The district has attended professional learning regarding the teacher residency model and is planning to utilize as needed for employing teachers.

As part of retention and recruitment and employing teachers post pandemic, the district offered employment incentives.

Academics

District curriculum coordinator along with each building level school improvement specialist provided training and collaboration time for all teachers to identify grade level essential standards for the 2022-2023 school year. Secondary teachers identified essential standards for all content areas; elementary teachers' focus was literacy and math. School improvement specialists supported content teams to identify new social studies and science curriculum resources. Curriculum support was provided by OCSS during science of reading focus walks and face to face coaching by 95% Group. The spring STAR assessment indicated kindergarten student growth at all elementaries.

During this quarter, building principals explored master schedule options to optimize student instructional time for next school year. A meeting was held on behalf of the district with Dr. Bloomberg, president of SEARK. The plan is for the upper level Math, Science and ELA courses to be taught at SEARK by their faculty for concurrent college credit. Discussion was also had related to creating a Middle College program that will meet graduation and associate degree requirements concurrently.

The district is planning to offer summer school for all grade levels utilizing 95% Group curriculum resources to support ELA foundational standards. Students ninth through twelfth grade will have an opportunity for credit recovery.

Family and Community Engagement

The district continues to work through the strategic planning process in collaboration with WestEd. The community advisory committee has identified focus strategies. Focus groups met to discuss the strategies, feasibility, and timeline of implementation. This July the committee members will participate in individual feedback meetings in efforts to share their

thoughts on the focus group feedback and how the committee will proceed for Phase III of the strategic planning process. The district is planning a community kick-off at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

Freddie Scott, ADE Community Engagement Liaison, leads monthly Pine Bluff Community Partners meetings. During the spring meetings it was emphasized that more focus was needed in creating a plan for support to the district that is built around the needs of the district versus what services to students each entity currently or is willing to provide. Col. Todd, Director of Veterans Affairs called for action from the group and individual community leaders towards this endeavor. It was proposed that a master plan will be developed and the various entities will be “plugged” into the area that is the best match for successful collaboration and support.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

Federal program deadlines and submissions were a focus during this quarter. Currently the district employs an interim federal programs director. DESE provided federal program support. The interim federal programs director spent time adjusting budget items, identifying expenditures, and completing the federal applications. During this quarter the general business manager has continued to make corrections to previous errors. Much of the focus has been on adjusting the salary schedule for the 2022-2023 school year. The business office has had turnover throughout the school year. Financial support will be an on-going need until the district is able to define roles and establish a system.

Summer 2022 Focus Priorities

- Secondary Master Schedules: new block schedule in eSchool, students scheduled, MOU and students enrolled at SEARK
- 6th and 9th grade teacher transitions to new schools, classrooms ready
- Building cleaning and maintenance
- Updating buildings for configuration and safety (securing PBHS)
- Provide targeted interventions during summer school
- Curriculum resource professional learning scheduled
- Hiring and training of key personnel