



DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Pine Bluff School District

Legislative Quarterly Report

October - December 2021

Submitted by
Office of Coordinated Support & Service
January 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 Support of Level 5 Support

October - December 2021

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. Pine Bluff has embraced 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

District enrollment of 3,350 students has been steady since the October 1st report. The district currently serves 233 students virtually through the approved digital plan. The district did struggle with students' virtual instruction, but issues have been resolved. Virtual Arkansas was a collaborative partner and provided additional assistance and support.

Staff and student safety became a priority at the beginning of the school year. The school and district implemented a multi-faceted plan designed to address the concerns related to order and have seen results. The overall school climate at the high school has improved. The high school faculty is more engaged with supervision and are enforcing safety protocols and expectations. Pine Bluff Police Department has taken a more visible role at the campuses. In addition, the school has contracted with PB off-duty officers during the school day that assist with supervision and maintaining a safe school campus. The district has also hired a commissioned security officer who serves the campus exclusively. The interaction between the safety and security personnel and the principal is becoming more collaborative and aligned to the school's security plan. There was a decline in office referrals during the months of October and November and no major fighting incidents occurred. PBHS administration prior to the break revisited the plan and data and will continue to make improvements as needed to improve the school climate and culture.

In collaboration with OCSS, the superintendent has created a manual to address a multi-tiered system of support for students. All lead principals have attended SmartData training and identified members for building level student intervention teams (SIT). Behavior management plans and SIT meetings are expected to be implemented at each campus starting January.

Human Capital

The district has struggled with a streamlined process between the business office and schools. Miscommunication, lack of procedures, or individuals not following policy has created a sense of frustration. In response, the district has created an Human Resource

Ticket System in order to assist with concerns regarding individuals' questions or concerns.

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 had four resignations by certified teachers in the month of December. The district's retention and recruitment director is continuing to collaborate with local colleges and the community to recruit quality staff.

Academics

New literacy curriculum materials have been delivered to respective campuses. Teachers have been through initial 95% Group Curriculum training. Two of the campuses have begun on-site training from the 95% Group Coach. Dr. Susan Hall, CEO of 95% Group, provided individual support via zoom with the district Curriculum and Instruction Director along with each elementary building school improvement specialist. Every elementary school is implementing 95% Group Core Phonics along with intervention programs. Jack Roby Junior High and Robert F. Morehead Middle School has received training and plans to begin implementation of the new curriculum in January.

All students who scored in the 24th percentile or lower on the initial STAR assessment have had further diagnostic assessments. Further assessments and/or interventions are in place. The District Dyslexia Specialist along with each building dyslexia specialist have analyzed the assessment data and created a plan to identify all students in need of support. Currently there are 138 students in the district receiving dyslexia interventions and 160 additional students placed on watch and receiving classroom interventions. These students will be provided additional assessments based on progress monitoring data.

All building principals have participated in the district focus walk calibration. Each building principal along with the assistant principal will conduct at least ten focus walks each week. The focus walk data will be shared at the building level and district level to address growth trends as well as professional development needs.

In order to address the needs in literacy, the district Curriculum and Instruction Director along with OCSS literacy support has created a science of reading focus walk tool for each building principal. Building principals are scheduled for individual science of reading professional development and focus walk collaboration.

Family and Community Engagement

The Pine Bluff School District is a collaborative partner in the G.R.I.P. (Gang Reduction Initiative of Pine Bluff) initiative. G.R.I.P. proactively addresses the increase in youth gangs and violence in the community. Working closely with Juvenile Judge E. Brown along with Sheriff Woods of Jefferson County and various other community partners the initiative will have a direct impact on the schools. The Governor's office and DESE have provided initial funding to assist with the implementation of the program. This project will provide four officers dedicated solely to prevention, intervention, and suppression of gang activity for at-risk youth. The district will have a mentor program starting with students as young as ten through the nationally recognized OK Program. These mentors will work alongside the G.R.I.P. officers

and be provided training specific to the needs of the students in Pine Bluff School District.

The Pine Bluff School District has established a community advisory committee to create a strategic plan for the district and a coordinated effort to receive feedback from the community. WestEd, a non-profit educational group, will assist in the facilitation of the meetings and planning. The committee has 20 representatives from local businesses, churches, non-profits, school district personnel, fraternal organizations, etc. Each member of the committee will have a shared responsibility to share information with the respective groups that they represent, solicit feedback from the community, and assist in preparing a survey. Over the next semester, the committee will grapple with discussions around board zones, millage, construction, etc.

Fiscal Governance and District Operations

Pine Bluff School District participated in two audits: closing out Dollarway FY 21 and Pine Bluff FY 21. There was only one reportable audit finding that has been corrected. This was a significant accomplishment for the district from previous audits and the outcome of dedicated Pine Bluff and DESE staff.. However, the district administration recognizes that there is a need to continue to implement protocols and systems for the financial department. DESE finance department has established an on-going fiscal support zoom each week to discuss positives and concerns with the district business manager and superintendent. Financial support will be an on-going need until the district is able to define roles and establish a system.

Fiscal Distress Plan

Pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § 6-20-1905, on August 31, 2017, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) identified the Pine Bluff School District as a school district in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education made this identification because the Pine Bluff School District had a declining balance identified by ADE to jeopardize the fiscal integrity of the school district.

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 Pine Bluff School District will enact the following fiscal distress improvement plan aimed at correcting all criteria for being classified as in fiscal distress. The Arkansas Department of Education will continue to provide technical assistance to 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 the revenue on the State Aid Notice.	September 30 th of each year
The district will budget all Foundation Funding in fund 2000.	September 30 th 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 th of each year
In collaboration with DESE, the district will identify staff positions and sections that are paid with operating funds that are not required to meet the Standards for Accreditation.	December 15, 2021
In collaboration with DESE, the district will develop a staffing plan that meets the Standards for Accreditation and utilizes a maximum of 85% of foundation funding for the next school year.	February 15, 2022

Objective 2: 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

Objective 3: 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 th of each Month
The district will submit all required reports/budgets to the proper agencies.	As Required by Deadlines

Objective 4: Implement best financial practices.

Action	Completion Date
In collaboration with DESE, the district will create and implement a written plan for internal controls processes.	March 2022
The district will conduct and document a physical inventory check annually.	Annually by September 30 th
The superintendent or assistant superintendent will open and document monthly review of the bank statement.	Monthly
The superintendent will print and document a review of a district Board Report from eFinance weekly for all funds.	Every Monday